



마리아 블랙헤이젤.

잔혹한 다국적 군사기업 밴더스내치의 총수, IQ 200의 천재.

냉혹한 전략전술의 귀재, 전사의 탈을 쓴 학살 전범.

지상의 페르세포네, 무수한 칭호를 가진 그녀를 사람들은 경애와 증오,

그리고 공포를 담아 이렇게 부른다. (절혹의 공주)라고.

그녀는 나와는 완전히 다른 세계의 사람이었다.

그 이름은 인터넷이나 신문의 뉴스에서 가십으로나 보는,

결코 내 인생과 연관될 리 없는 하늘 위의 사람이었다.

그런 그녀가 내 앞에 나타났다. 입술을 겹쳤다.

그리고 애정과 집착이 깃든 목소리로 속삭였다.

“만나고 싶었어요, 오라버니.”

갑자기 세계 최고의 여동생 '님' 을 갖게 되었다?!

2011년 시드노벨 공모전 제1기 입선작.

사상 최고의 여동생 '님' 이야기 드디어 개막!!

2012. 01. 01 발행



정가 6,500원

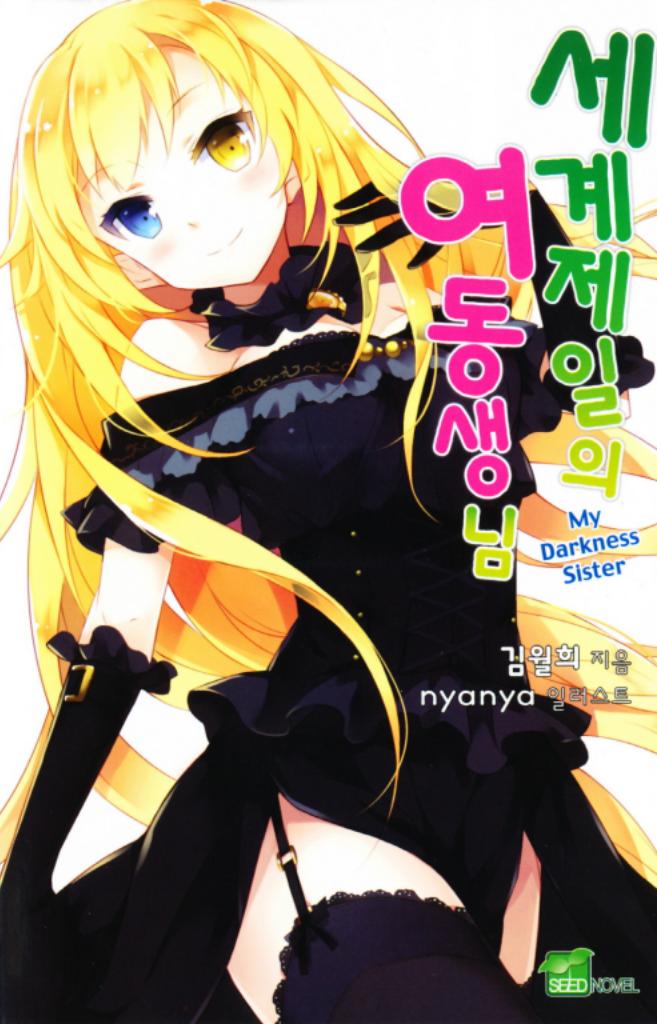
이 작품의 저작권은 시드노벨에 있으며, 저작권법에 의해 보호를 받는 저작물이므로 불법 복제와 스캔 등을 이용한 온·오프라인에서의 무단전재 및 유로·공유시 법적 제재를 받습니다.



세계  
제일의  
여동생님

김월희  
지음

시드노벨



세계  
제일의  
여동생님  
My  
Darkness  
Sister

김월희 지음

nyanya 일러스트



SEED NOVEL



“아아, 오라버니…… 좋아해요,  
오라버니잇……♡”

“이렇게 가까이서 오라버니의 체취를 맡을 수 있다니,  
아아……. 소녀는 너무나 행복한 나머지 머리가  
어질어질해질 지경이에요!”



“두 사람 모두, 오라버니께 맘이 지나치구나.  
아무리 식사 배너가 영양이고, ‘블랙헤이젤로서의 기품’  
은 요만큼도 찾을 수 없으며, 혈통의 절반에는 비천한 왕인  
종의 피가 흐르고 있는 사람아지만 말이지!  
그대도…… 하나뿐인 우리들의 오라버니란다?”



“제련 맹청이랑 같은 학교에 다니게 되었다간  
분명히 부끄러워서 죽어버릴 거예요!”



“……리리도, 제련 마보왕 다니는 거, 부끄러워…….”



“이 아이야말로 저희 밴더스내치가 자랑하는 최강의 에이전트.”

“블랙헤이젤 당주 직속의 다목적 특수부대,  
흑의의 숙녀회(Lady in Black) 소속 서열  
제4위. 코드네임 《요정사수》.”

“리리 슈피엘 소령입니다.”

# I . Maria :: She is the law

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/001.

"Ahhh, finally... finally I have found you...♪"

A girl of golden radiance was before me.

Ripe, cherry red lips; straight honey-blonde hair, flowing down to her hips; long, curvilinear eyebrows in the shape of a crescent moon, arcing like the antennae of a silk moth; deep and beautiful heterochromatic eyes of blue and gold, seemingly not of this world, smiling lightly; and soft, lily-white skin of an angel down from heaven.

She was adorned in black: an off-the-shoulder blouse revealing her skin above its low neckline; a pair of long, silk gloves; over-knee socks fastened with garter belts tightly pulling them over her legs; and a pair of leather boots.

—Maria.

Maria Lunalady Blackhazel.

There's no way I wouldn't recognize her.

It's not that I'm acquainted with her. I've never met her even once, let alone exchanged letters or e-mails, nothing like that.

Even so, I just know.

It would be impossible not to.

「The one and only female head of the Blackhazel family, whose assets as Romania's colossal war industry conglomerate are estimated to account for 10 percent of the world's wealth. The commander of Bandersnatch — an international private military company with direct involvements in over 70 percent of all international conflicts on earth, regardless of borders. An unprecedented genius proficient in politics, philosophy, economy and other liberal arts, and fluent in 9 languages.

Feared and revered for her overpowering charisma, she is otherwise known as the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》.」

Whether it's the BBC or Le Monde, she's a legendary figure that every national media keeps an eye on like stalkers — using her every move as news material.

There's just no way I can't not know her.

“For the last 15 years, there was never a moment where I've forgotten you.”

And that same Maria is speaking in fluent Korean in front of the lectern. What's more, it's clear as day that her eyes are looking this way.

\*click click\*

With disciplined gait, Maria steps down from the lectern and walks across the middle of the classroom. The sound of her high-heels resonates clearly like a bell on a night of New Year's Eve.

With her last step as the starting point, all my sense of reality begins to break apart.

“W-Wh... what?”

I stutter like an idiot, as if I've been devolved into a goldfish with a single-digit IQ.

Although I'm just looking at her eyes, there's an overwhelming force that suffocates you.

Call it her “aura”, if you will.

Who would've thought I'd actually experience the actual meaning of “being overwhelmed” deep down into my bones like in mangas and novels?

Well, that's fully understandable.

It's not strange or surprising in the very least.

Almost within my arm's reach is none other than the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 herself. She's simply right in front of me, less than a meter away.

I'd like to meet anyone who can lift their head straight indifferently before this overwhelming force.

At the very least, I can say for sure that I don't have such fortitude.

The high school classroom, which couldn't be any more ordinary, was already transformed into an anomaly zone, as though lifetime's worth of shock was condensed into this one area.

Preoccupied in these inane thoughts of mine, it wasn't long before Maria made the first move without warning.

\*fwoosh\*

Honestly, it was a sudden, single finishing blow that would never happen again in a lifetime.

If I were to do so, I can still describe the scene at the moment the way it was. For example, the middle-aged teacher frozen stiff with the chalk in his hand stuck to the blackboard. My 36 classmates with their mouths gaping open, so motionless that I'd think they might never move again. Down to the cheerful harmony of the larks that were chirping away without a care, as if to say all this was none of their business.

"Prepare yourself. I will not let go of you ever again now, **Siyoung-oniisama.**"

Maria's sweet, crystal-clear voice tickled against my ears.

Spoken flawlessly without an accent, her words reverberated faintly, leaving behind a wave of sincerity.

Dumbstruck by the incomprehensibility of the situation, my sense of taste and touch were the only things being relayed back to me.

The viscid strand of saliva stretched between lips to lips, the softness of a half-melted ice cream, the sweetness of a fluffy cotton candy that gently settles in your mouth.

Locked in her fast embrace with her lips sealing mine, that was the taste of Maria's daring French kiss.





Few days have passed since that day and I'm currently at the Blackhazel mansion, located on the outskirts of Brașov, Romania.

It's morning and Dorothy is yet again harassing me — relentlessly poking my cheek with her fork.

"Hey! You stupid, idiotic Onii-san~!"

Failing to keep her sadistic pleasure in control, she bursts out laughing like a baby.

She caught me completely off guard while I was enjoying a cup of coffee in silence, and my upper body flinched violently.

Expelling the liquids flowing backward from the throat into the mug, I cough like crazy.

"Hey! Cut it out, will you?! Can you just please leave me alone?!"

"Pfft, I'll keep bugging you until you're dead!"

"Grrr, why you little...!"

I know it's is completely useless to act tough and serious at her.

Dorothy doesn't take me serious in the slightest. She never backs down, anyway. Yes, like now, she just sticks out her tongue and snickers like a little devil.

Her twin-tails, rolled up into curls, wavers blissfully. Each time she sways her head, the rays of light that comes through the window would scatter across the room in oblique directions.

And the tight, classy, black Armani suit she was wearing emphasized her femininity, along with her unique style.

As for where I am in the mansion, I'm sitting at the grand table with two other people in the dining room.

Sitting at the middle is me, and on each ends of the table are Maria and her identical twin sister "Dorothy Iblis Blackhazel".

Now then, time for a question.

Why on earth am I included here?

No matter how many times I ask myself, it's unlikely that I'd get a proper answer. To be more exact, I did get an answer from her, but I couldn't understand it.

Well, probably.

"Mmm. You see, Dorothy..."

Unable to bear the sight of Dorothy's persistent bullying any more, Maria pushes the silver-rimmed glasses up to the bridge of her nose and gently scolds her.

"Despite his appearance, this person is our Onii-sama. As such, how about we treat him with a little more appropriate level of formality and affection?"

Ehh, she sounds less commanding than a bottle of flat soda...

Even so, taking into account of how Maria's words carry considerable weight in this household, this is a golden opportunity to establish some authority for me here.

I can't let this chance slip by.

"That's right! A little sister shouldn't act like a rabid dog to her godly older brother like that!"

"H-Hauuu...! But Onee-sama! There's no way that this prematurely ejaculating cherry boy, who doesn't even know basic table manners, could possibly qualify as a Blackhazel!"

"Manners?! I don't want to hear that from a person who pokes someone else's cheek with a fork!"

But more importantly, how do you know if I'm a quick-shot or not?!

"Hmph! Behhhh~!"

Dorothy sticks out her tongue again for me to see in provocation. Man, I'm about to blow a fuse here. Nevertheless, the final judgment is always in the hands of the household's current master — Maria.

While at each other's throat, Dorothy and I carefully glance over to Maria.

"I see..." Maria nods with a refreshing smile on her face. "Indeed, there needs to be drastic changes to Onii-sama in regards to that matter."

It's my loss.

"No, er... Although it doesn't seem like it, I'm trying pretty hard here. But the thing about habits is that, well, you can't just expect it to change overnight."

"You are my Onii-sama, for goodness sake! To think that you are stricken with shameful conditions of 'premature ejaculation' and 'erectile dysfunction'! As Onii-sama's little sister and current master of the Blackhazel family, I, Maria Lunalady Blackhazel, will not allow this!"

"...What's your thought on the phrase 'if there is no bread, let them eat cake'?"

If they can understand the context of the conversation at this much level, then I'd be really impressed.

"Hmm? Well, I reckon it is a proverb."

"Yeah, yeah! It's a proverb. A proverb~♪"

"....."

These young ladies are way out of touch with the world. Or maybe they're feigning ignorance and hiding inside a smokescreen.

Personally, I'd like to bet on the latter. At least one thing I can be sure of is that, with such confident answer, it'll leave the side that retorts at a loss for words.

With a soft sigh, I cut a slice of steak on the plate with my knife and proceed to chew it. Supposedly, this Wagyu ribeye steak was sent directly from a Kobe beef ranch in Japan. Although I don't know how exactly the beef got on the table, considering its import has been banned from majority of the countries since 2002, the pleasure of eating is the only thing I can enjoy after arriving here.

And, sure enough...

That damn Dorothy is poking my cheek again with her fork, and what's more, it has her saliva on it.

Are you seriously poking my cheek with that fork?

Eventually, I run out of patience and spin my head around.

\*bite\*

Like a predator after its prey, I snatch Dorothy's fork with my mouth.

"...Hau?"

Then for an instant, not understanding what has just happened, Dorothy tilts her head innocently. Consequently, it didn't take long for her brain to absorb the information and her face to turn white as a sheet.

Oh my, what a rare and unusual sight I'm seeing.

As I nod my head lost in that sort of sentimental appreciation, Dorothy bursts out with her hands trembling.

"H-H-How dare you, you crazy bastard!"

Even before my cerebral cortex can send Dorothy's words to the speech-control center, the sense of pain outruns them with the speed of light. It's a straight punch. One that's on a level where I'd have to add the prefix "mega-" to it.

Also, the left hook combo that followed was a critical hit. On the clean and efficient movement, I give you a score of nine on a ten-point scale. Clap, clap, clap.

"What the hell are you doing to a cute and pure young lady's fork! Huh?! Die! Die! Go write a will already and drop dead, you human trash! "

"Gah! Hey, you're killing me! You're killing your older brother! Owww, a cute and pure young lady is killing an innocent person!"

With infernal ferocity, she tramples viciously on my fallen corpse... with her shoes on.

Ah, the marvelous Western custom of wearing your shoes indoors. My, what a wonderful culture shock!

So...

Just exactly what did I do wrong to suffer this horrible retribution? From the start, I was a fool to have hoped for a rose-colored development like ~Doki-Doki Heart-pounding Cohabitation with Beautiful Twin Sisters!~ even for a moment. I'm an idiot unmatched in idiocy.

Why couldn't I realize something so obvious?

An obvious truth; ideals are high up in the sky, while reality is stuck in the bottom, deep down in the sewers.

I end up recalling the day of that incident that brought forth this overly complicated situation that I'm currently in.

The day my "little sister" stormed into my peaceful life, blowing away everything like a Category 5 hurricane.



"Whoa, just what in the world..."

This is totally unreal. Touching and wiping my lips, I try my best to pretend that I'm calm. It's a completely stiff and awkward behavior, like a rookie actor being on the stage for the first time.

"Erm, Blackhazel... san?"

I attach an honorific at the end, thinking it'd probably be impolite of me to carelessly call the name of the person I've just met today.

"Fufu, it's okay to use my name when you call me."

Amused by my reaction, Maria giggles with her hand covering her mouth.

"Now, repeat after me: Maria."

It's like I'm a five year old kid to her. Even if she tells me—a person she just met for the first time—to call her by her name, I really don't feel like calling her after hearing that from her.

"No, even if you insist...."

"I won't respond to you if you don't call me by my name."

"What's the meaning of all this in the first pl—"

"Maria."

Instead of an explanation, I get an imaginary slap on the wrist.

Maria narrows her eyes and puffs up her cheek like a hamster with feed stuffed in its cheeks. Her expression is cute, rather than angry.

For few minutes, there's an awkward silence.

In the end, waving a white flag, I give in to Maria's tacit request and hesitantly open my mouth.

"Ma-Maria."

There's an innocent smile on her face; she seems to be enjoying it.

"Ahhh, I'm shivering...♡ I've been called by my name by Onii-sama for the first time!"

Well then, nice to know that you're moved by something like this.

"Umm... Anyway, leaving that aside..."

I'll probably never see the end of it if I get dragged into her pace. So I decide to skip on majority of what has happened so far.

Since it's obvious things would get drawn-out if I started asking questions about them...

"Is there something bothering you? Please confess me your troubles!"

Slightly slanting her body forward with her arms behind her back, Maria tilts her head upwards — giving her an appearance of a cat looking up mischievously.

“If you don’t mind me asking, do you know what this place is, by any chance?”

“Eh? Of course I do. Isn’t it a school, where illiterate commoners receive education?”

“W-Well, you’re right... kind of.”

Well, not really. If you think about it, nothing she said is incorrect. It’s the right answer. So, my verdict on her score is— wait, wait, that’s not it.

However, it seems that my response was odd to her, judging from how Maria is looking around the classroom. Each time there’s an eye contact with Maria, I can see people cowering in plain sight or having a tense expression on their face here and there.

Yet, why is it that Maria can’t realize the irregularity of the situation we’re in?

Maria tilts her head sideways with innocent eyes conveying her cluelessness.

“And what does that have to do with anything, Onii-sama?”

“No, you see, I’m in middle of a class.”

Because she replied so confidently, I almost forgot what to say back.

“A-Ah—! You’re certainly right! How could I have let these inferior and odiferous proletariats interfere with our conversation! Embarrassingly, it’s my...mistake...”

Speaking hesitantly, she twirls her body in embarrassment.

Wow.

She’s completely off the mark on that point, this girl.

About now, I can’t even get myself to gather the strength to point out she’s being embarrassed about the wrong thing. As you’ve heard, that was her reply in regards to my answer.

And it was just at that moment.

“B-Both of you! What’s all this ruckus in middle of my class?!”

After the commotion has settled down, the middle-aged teacher who has regained his composure breaks into the conversation.

Okay, I’m fine with all this, but... What do you mean by “both of you”? If we were to really put this into classification, I’m the victim here, not the one causing a ruckus. So if you label us as a whole like that, you’re putting me in a very difficult position.

When I was thinking those inane complaints in my mind, Maria spoke.

“And just who gave you the freedom to speak?”

Suddenly, Maria’s expression became cold and heartless.

Those eyes that were smiling kindly just a moment ago were now emitting an air of malevolence, like the enigmatic eyes of a devil.

—\*shudder\*

The flustered look and beautiful smile that was on her face just a moment ago were gone. It’s like she took off the mask she had been wearing until now.

“Haaah...”

Maria shrugs her shoulders; and she begins to speak in a cold, clear voice.

“Could it perhaps be that you do not understand the position you are currently in?”

“I-I’m the teacher here! You’re the one talking nonsense!”

In lieu of a reply is a frightening glare, as sharp as a honed rapier for piercing through flesh.

Just the mere act of glaring is overpowering him.

It’s on a whole different level.

"However, I am in a great mood today. Therefore, I cannot feel the necessity to punish your ignorance that has sprung from your benightedness. So please, close your mouth and stay silent like a domesticated animal you are."

"W-What?! That's—!"

"Ahh, and one more thing."

Maria cuts off the enraged teacher before he can argue.

"If it is possible, would you be so kind as to not breathe? For Onii-sama to breathe in the same air as these filthy serfs— It pains me so much that my heart is on the verge of breaking."

Suffice to say, she managed to corner the teacher into mental breakdown with her sheer force alone.

Maria, who just subdued the teacher with her piercing stare, turns her head towards me with the tender expression.

It looks like I'm the only person permitted with this "freedom of speech".

I feel like I've become a working-class spokesman urging a proletarian revolution.

So, er, I'm talking about a socialist paradise, everyone!

—No, no. That's not it.

"Say... I think words like "proletariats" and "serfs" are a little anachronistic in a modern society and go against the concept of human rights."

"Not quite, Onii-sama! After all, Hegel hypothesized that the spirit of the age was a circular loop: Repeating itself without progress. In the end, the ignorant masses are nothing more than subjects of domestication, not edification."

"The words 'ignorant masses' are a bit too..."

"You're saying it degrades the elegance of the argument, right?! Ahhh, you're indeed my Onii-sama!"

...That's not what I meant.

Going off on her own delusion, Maria continues her speech.

“Then I will correct it to ‘low-cost, expendable working class that sustains the bottom of the social hierarchy’!”

Goodness, just look at her.

So, in short, Maria’s expression is this.

The expressing you make when another person asks you what one plus one equals.

And she speaks like it’s so obvious.

Moreover, she’s saying it right in front of those “low-cost, expendable working class that sustains the bottom of the social hierarchy” without hesitation.

“Okay, stop it there!”

The teacher’s one thing; but are you planning on emotionally scarring all of my classmates?

Because of that, I immediately jump out of my chair; it’s so that I can get out of the classroom with Maria. Running away, in short.

“Uhmm. Please continue with the class, teacher.”

“Please excuse me for my interruption in your studies. What sweet dreams you all have.”

Would there be another day where I’d realize my ancestor’s proverb “the mouth is the gate of misfortune” this thoroughly?

Even if there is, I’d rather not go through it. I’d really rather not.

And the teacher who usually takes pride in the fact he joined the labor union that was the foundation of Marx’s theory of working class revolution was standing speechless like a stone statue.

Well, guess it’s nothing new now.

Thinking “whatever happens, happens”, I run out of the classroom.

Maria, who was watching my face closely, asks like she’s quite worried.

“Say, Onii-sama? You seem a little uncomfortable. Is there anything wrong with you, by any chance?”

“Does this look like ‘a little’ uncomfortable to you?!”

“A-Ah?! Then I’ll call a medical team right away—“

“Stop, stop! That’s exactly the problem! You’re going through unnecessary troubles!”

Did she realize that it wasn’t a physical problem? Maria smiles with a sigh of relief.

“Fufu, oh Onii-sama. Those trivial things are none of our concern. Wouldn’t the important thing be the problem between me and Onii-sama?”

You’re still going on with that “Onii-sama”?

Would you please stop that?

“No, I mean, how am I your older brother to begin with? I’m a fucking Kimchi..... no, this isn’t it. Yes! I’m Korean!”

“You’re half Romanian and half Korean.”

“Ugh!”

Right on point.

But even if that’s true, how is it that my father’s side is suddenly from the “Blackhazel” family?! What’s up with this absurd premise?!

Is this some kind of a third-rate hidden reality show?

My mind is racing with such possibilities.

It was then that I noticed other teachers and students were peeking at us helplessly.

“Ugh. First, let’s go somewhere it’s quiet, and then we can talk.”

We’re on the third floor. I promptly grab and pull Maria’s hand, then head towards the flight of stairs to reach the rooftop on the upper floor.

“Ah, eh, umm, hauu.....?!”

Well, Maria’s entire face is flushing red again. I wonder why, but soon enough I realize that we’re holding hands.

Is this the same girl that stole my first kiss in front of everybody? I can’t believe your shyness circuit activates normally at the wrong place. Well, even so, it’s not like I’m in a laidback position to be considerate in this kind of place. No siree.

I struggled up the stairs. Once there, I remove the dial lock, which had its numbers cracked long ago, and open the rusty iron door.

I hear a metallic creak, and it was precisely at that moment when I thought the door had opened.

It wasn’t sunlight that filled my sight, but series of metallic objects of the blackest black that covered the sky in darkness.

Now it’s my turn to gape my mouth open.

No wonder I’ve been hearing strange noises.

『DuDuDuDu...』

In the distant sky, dozens of AH-64D Longbow Apache military helicopters were circling around mid-air. I don’t have expert knowledge of military technology in particular, but I know fully well that those Hellfire air-to-surface missiles attached under the two wings aren’t used for mere practical jokes.

And that’s not all.

The schoolyard was already filled with mysterious black sedans. And in the center was a Cadillac Platinum Edition limousine, elegantly displaying its smooth, curvaceous streamlined form.

Now this was truly a sight to behold.

Furthermore, the head of a howling grey wolf emblazoned on those military helicopters is the emblem of Bandersnatch — the world's largest international private military group that lives up to its name.

All this can only mean one thing.

—Discretionary extraterritoriality of a civilian military commander.

No matter how far and wide you search in this world, there's only one civilian military commander who's officially recognized by the United Nations.

The only person who can make all this ridiculous setting come true in reality.

This isn't a hidden reality show or anything like that. There's no way any TV show in their right mind would spend that much money on this extravagant set for a single episode.

In another words, if all this is real, then I have committed an unspeakable courtesy in front of such prominent figure.

Maria takes her hand out quietly from my listless hand.

She takes a few steps forward, and turns her body round to see me face-to-face again.

Seemingly not of this world, her deep and beautiful heterochromatic eyes of blue and gold tempts him.

With a subtle smile on her face, Maria's expression is gentle beyond measure and elegant, like that of an angel.

But that's only how she looks on the outside.

Now that I've realized her true nature, I probably can no longer take that smile just as it is.

A pinch of salt— no, at least a sack of salt would be necessary.

“At this very moment...”

However, Maria's action that soon followed was something ominous and entirely unforeseen that threw my expectations upside down.

"My dearest wish that I have been yearning for 13 years has come true at last."

With both hands, Maria raises the hem of the skirt gracefully, then pulls her left leg one step backward and slightly bends her knees.

It's a traditional European-style gesture of greeting of a lady that you often see in movies.

"My name is Maria Lunalady Blackhazel. I give you my formal salutation once more, Onii-sama."

Her concise words would later come to completely change my life.

The motionless cogwheel takes motion.

**"—Welcome, to my empire that I have prepared for you and you alone."**

And thus, the curtain rises for a new story.

/002.

「On the 9th of last month, Commander Blackhazel of the international private military company Bandersnatch arrived at the Incheon International Airport to discuss the substitute troop deployment for the temporary absence of military force, caused by the relocation of an American base south of Weonnam-seon at Pyeongyang. In that morning, Commander Blackhazel had a meeting with the Minister of National Defense Kim and leading members of the military at the Blue House<sup>1</sup>, and...」

Once again, I'm at the Blackhazel Mansion located on the outskirts of Brașov, Romania. Or more specifically, I'm at my all-too-awkward room inside the mansion.

Part way through copy-pasting the article on the computer, I click the back button. As I look, the content displayed on the monitor is none other than a search results

<sup>1</sup> Blue House: Known as Cheongwadae (青瓦臺) in Korean, it is the executive office and official residence of the President of the Republic of Korea. Think of it as an equivalent to the White House.

page on a portal site about Maria's background. Excluding rumors and conspiracy theories, here are some of the impressive quotes that I've picked out.

「Completing the doctoral program in an American military university at the age of 11, she received the Best PhD Thesis Award for her "Militaristic Reconstruction and Comparative Analysis of Stalin's National Strategy".」

「Right after her graduation, she was appointed as a staff officer in the international private military company Bandersnatch. During the Revolution of Kuwait and Middle East Rebellions, where they were at a major disadvantage, she led the allied forces to victory from the front line to—(omitted)」

「A genocidal war criminal in angel's clothing. Persephone<sup>2</sup> on earth.」

「The second coming of 21<sup>st</sup> century Clausewitz<sup>3</sup>. The greatest military tactics expert of the century.」

I intently read the backgrounds of the girl inside the screen.

Her name is Maria Lunalady Blackhazel.

Also known as the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》, she's a perfect lady with both intelligence and beauty. A flower in a painting.

And...

“Ahhh, Onii-sama... I love you, Onii-samaaa...♡”

Behaving like a spoiled child, this defenseless and clumsy girl—who's clinging on to me with both of her arms around my shoulder—is definitely the same person.

They're the same, all right.

There's no way that two people with such monstrous careers can exist in the same world, and I really don't want to imagine a parallel universe where those two could exist.

<sup>2</sup> Persephone: A Greek goddess, who carries into effect the curses of men upon the souls of the dead.

<sup>3</sup> Clausewitz: A Prussian Major-General and military theorist, well-known for his notable work Vom Kriege.

I've heard that human psyche shuts off information processing when it's exposed to extreme situation beyond processing...

Because I can't really feel the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 repetitively rubbing her cheeks against me in a display of fierce physical affection.

Am I... shaking right now?<sup>4</sup>

Surely there must've been a serious error in the story's development.

Leaving aside the straightforward and nonsensical premise of being the Blackhazel's hidden child, I really can't understand the fact that I'm from the same blood as the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》.

"Being able to smell Onii-sama's scent up close like this, ahhh... I feel dizzy just by thinking about how happy I am!"

But just what exactly was the error?

Although I came here by my own free will, it was actually more like I had no choice in the matter. Anyway, in a private jet, I was shown a bunch of data to bring me up to speed. You could say that they were cold, hard facts. Aside from the exact biographical data registered at the government office, there were things from my RH- blood type, at what age I was left at which orphanage, whom I was adopted by, and the list goes on.

Even if I don't exclude the possibility of fabrication, just what does the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 have to gain by doing so?

There isn't.

"No, let's put that aside for now."

"What is it, Onii-sama?"

"Could you let go of me a little? I'm having a difficult time breathing."

<sup>4</sup> A famous line from the Korean drama series "Sandglass", uttered by Tae-soo shortly before his federal execution.

"I don't want to. Even for a second more, I want to feel Onii-sama's body firmly in my arms."

Shaking her head, she hugs me even tighter. She's more tenacious than a serpent constricting its prey. No, it's worse than that.

"Onii-sama's scent, breath, voice and down to your single last cell; I find them so endearing and loveable that I can't hold back any longer."

Even a lovey-dovey couple in the heat of their burning passion would show more discretion than her.

"So I'll never let go of you. No, I can't let go of you."

"Mm... I understand your feeling. But..."

Actually, I don't understand it at all.

"It's not like you can spend the whole day stuck to me like this, right?"

I'm not a glue stick, you know.

"Let's see if I can."

"Sorry, but I absolutely prefer that you don't!"

Giggling mischievously to those words, Maria pokes me in the side with her finger.

"Uwah?!"

Before I can even react back to that sudden stab, she nibbles on my earlobe mischievously, and then whispers.

"My my, you are such a shy boy, Onii-sama..."

For goodness sake.

I have no intention of intruding into your personal delusion, but there are boundaries. And stop causing trouble to others around you!

'...Saying that probably won't work.'

Then it's time for a change of tactic.

If my hard-line policy doesn't work, then I'll use a softer stance to make her let go of me no matter what.

"Say, Maria..."

"Ye-es?"

With her arms still tightly wound around my shoulder, Maria looks up and slowly tilts her head at me like a puppy.

"It's been quite a while since we ate. Aren't you hungry?"

"I'm full just by breathing in the same air as Onii-sama. Why, I'm so full that I feel like I'm pregnant with Onii-sama's child!"

'Your love really knows no boundaries.'

It's enough to make my skin crawl.

"Well, you may not be hungry, but I am."

"Ah-h?! Is that so? In that case..."

Good, now we're going somewhere.

With a look of confusion on her face, it seems Maria is caught in a dilemma.

And Maria's decision after that much consideration is:

"Here, please feel free to devour me♪"

—this.

"What are you, Anpanman<sup>5</sup>?!"

"Relieving my Onii-sama's lust, don't you think that's a basic duty for any excellent little sister?

<sup>5</sup> Anpanman: A Japanese cartoon character, whose head is made of bread filled with red bean paste.

Really, I don't even want to understand what she just said metaphorically.

Then how should I take her words?

I do not want her to in any shape or form. There's no way that I could want such a thing.

However, even if I don't want to, what power does a mere citizen like me have in front of the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》?

In the end, this is just a downscaled version of what you see in society. It's a hierarchy structure where subordinates obey their superiors unconditionally.

Well, it's like in the military: Shut the hell up and do as you're told.



“Kyaah—?!”

If I recall correctly, I said something about a hierarchy structure at that time.

Right now, I'm on top of Dorothy. Her white blouse is half-off and she's on the verge of crying.

After binding Dorothy's wrists with a pair of leather cuffs to subdue her opposition, I smile wickedly, licking my lips like a certain caretaker violating students at an all-girls music academy.<sup>6</sup>

She puts up a resistance, struggling helplessly with a pool of tears in her pretty, harelite eyes.

As she does, her curly honey-blonde twintails dance around, loose and disheveled.

“Fufu, you're no longer my little sister!”

Shaking her head wildly, Dorothy cries out.

“I-I'm sorry, Onii-san! I won't do it again... P-please, I beg of you! Forgive me!”

“There is no use asking for forgiveness now! You will pay dearly for looking down on your older brother, the one and only!”

<sup>6</sup> Reference to Kato Shusaku, the eponymous protagonist of a BDSM eroge by ELF.

“No, please, I beg of you! I’m truly sorry!”

“A naughty child like you needs to be punished accordingly!”

“Please, anything but that... No! Please help me, Onee-sama!”

It’s unlikely that your desperate cry for help will reach Maria, who’s outside currently.

This is another superior-subordinate hierarchy structure established inside the mansion between me and Dorothy, so to speak.

Thus, ignoring Dorothy’s fainting cry, with her pure white breasts, I—

\*SMACK!\*

With a rhythmic sound effect, my consciousness rushes up from its sleep like a coiled spring.

“Gyaaaaah!”

I sit up on the sofa in an excruciating pain and look around my surroundings. This place is the living room used for reception inside the Blackhazel Mansion.

Then I notice I’ve been drooling in my sleep, along with Dorothy looking askance at me. Judging from how she’s in her school uniform and has a bag over her shoulder, it seems she just came back from school after her last class.

“Geez, what an eyesore! Do you know how disgusting you looked, sleeping like a hobo with a stupid smile on your face?!”

It was a nice dream too...

“Damn it! It was you, wasn’t it?! You smacked the back of my head while I was having a good sleep!”

Dorothy snorts dismissively and raises me her middle finger in an audacious manner.

“Yeah, it was me. Got a problem with that? You stupid, idiotic Onii-san.”

“Nah, I got 99 problems.”

Sounding like she didn’t understand what I just said, Dorothy snaps back at me.

“What? I’m not good with slangs, so say it plainly.”

“I’m saying I got 99 problems but a bitch ain’t one.”

“...”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

“Ah, okay... So, you got 99 problems but a bitch isn’t one. Then it’d be okay for me to hit you, right?”

“It’s a good thing that you catch on quick, my little sister.”

“Who do you think you’re playing with, you crazy idiot!”

Finally grasping the situation, Dorothy’s action is—as I thought—preparing for a straight punch. Hmm, this time I might have to attach “Hyper” at the front and “Finisher” at the end.

I swiftly lower my body and assume a guarding stance by lifting my arms. It’d be a lot better to be hit somewhere else than my face and save myself some dental fees.

“H-hold on a second! Why don’t we talk this over like civilized people of the 21st century?”

“Just drop dead, you human trash!”

“W-what?! Drop dead? Okay, understood! I’ll drop dead! So please put down that fist of yours!”

“Words are useless!”

Yes! There it is, ladies and gentlemen! An uppercut from the below, followed by a left hook! A clean finish by boxer Dorothy! Clearly, this isn’t her first time beating people up. What a terrifying sight we’re seeing here today!

"Understand this, alright? You say stuff like that next time, I'll seriously kill you!"

Dorothy spits out in a cold voice, brushing off her hands.

"I-I understand..."

Lying on the ground like a corpse, I nod my head weakly.

Then, within a flash of lighting, the dream I just had crosses my mind.

The important thing is to get a pre-emptive strike! If I first get my authority back as an older brother, things will change for the better then.

All right.

Taking deep breaths slowly, I collect my composure.

Let's see... What did I say in my dream again?

Ah yes, right. It went like this.

"Who the hell do you think I am? Bring it on! I'll teach you a lesson not to mess with your older brother! One that you'll never forget!"

"Oh really~?"

However, Dorothy overwhelms me with just her glare. This cruel reality is nothing like the dream I had!

Dorothy is glowering at me, with her eyes inviting me to a fight.

I flinch slightly, but it's already too late to back off now.

"You're no longer my little sister!"

I've been letting her hit me all along since she's my little sister, but no more. Dorothy is a girl and I'm a healthy 18 year old boy. Girls are absolutely no match for boys in terms of physical strength. Therefore, I can win this if I just pin her down with brute force.

In other words: Domestication flag route!

There's a saying that it only takes a moment of courage for a man to turn into a wolf.

Wait...

But now that I think about it, wolves are members of the canine family.

They're basically dogs.

.....

I'm probably not going to make it.

"Ah~ Is that so? Then why don't I beat you into a fine dust and you can go buy yourself an electronic anklet<sup>7</sup>!"

I think this became a good opportunity for us to firmly establish the order of rank of the master-servant relationship, and who can give out ruthless beatings. I really do.



Let's continue talking about Dorothy for a little bit more.

If you were to ask me why she's furious like this because she can't kick her only older brother out, not giving a damn about our brother-sister relationship, then I think I might know the reason why.

I had no intention to get on her bad side like that when I got here, of course.

That happened about a week ago.

The very day that I met Maria and suddenly became the Blackhazel's eldest son.

I was heading towards Romania in Eastern Europe, far away from the northern hemisphere, on Maria's private jet.

Of course, the decision of abandoning your home and going somewhere else overnight might be difficult to understand right away. But it wasn't a problem for me. I was a half-blooded, working-class student living in a one room

<sup>7</sup> Reference to how sex offenders are given electronic tags as surveillance; Dorothy is basically calling him a pedophile.

mansion<sup>8</sup> and changing rents every three months. Ever since I became independent from my foster parents on my own, I had no one to call as my legal guardian.

I have a pretty complicated past, if I do say so myself.

Anyhow, the place I arrived after all night was Otopeni International Airport, located northwest of Romania's capital Bucharest. After we got off the private jet, we kept on traveling in the Lincoln Continental limousine that was standing just outside in advance.

The treatment I received throughout the course of getting to the mansion was something of an awe-inspiring level of privilege that an ordinary person like me could never dream of in their lifetime. Even now, it's hard for me to express the feeling of becoming like a prince of a royal family.

So I'd be lying if I told you I wasn't looking forward to it.

Who could have expected things to unfold this way?

The Blackhazel mansion situated at the northern foot of Carpathian Mountains wasn't an ancient Gothic castle like the one in Dracula. Rather, it was a sophisticated, postmodern present-age building harmonized with the essence of geometry.

As soon as I opened the car door—admiring the sensuous beauty of the building's architectural design—and stepped outside, that happened.

A mysterious shadow ran towards me from the front door and hugged me.

Judging from its soft and babylike skin, I could vaguely tell that the mysterious shadow that clung to me was a young girl.

I'm talking about the girl that's busy intensely expressing her affection by rubbing her cheeks against mine.

So there was another person waiting for my return besides Maria.

Ahh, this development is straight out of a Japanese eroge.

<sup>8</sup>One room mansion: Japanese apartment style in which there is only one small room and usually a compact bathroom. (Wiki)

Frankly, I was kind of baffled at first; however, I knew by intuition that my inflated expectation had already become a reality.

But the first words she blurted out all of a sudden were,

“Welcome back, Onee-sama! I, Dorothy, was eagerly waiting for my Onee-sama to return~♪”

Haha, so you were eagerly waiting for me.

But wait...

What?

Did she just say “Onee-sama”?

I probably misheard her. Yeah, I must have.

“Oh my, Dorothy! That’s quite a daring display of affection for your Onii-sama already!”

“...Fueh?”

At Maria’s words, the girl named “Dorothy” finally regains her rationality and raises her head for the first time.

Ahh, and that expression.

The face of a pure, innocent girl in her first love was stricken with dismay and terror as our eyes met.

It would be sort of like finding out in the morning that the person you spent the wedding night with was another man that you didn’t even know. There’s no way it could ever happen, but it seemed it was that shocking to her.

Well, okay. I’m fine. I’m fine with all that.

But you know what. Even so, how am I the one to blame?

You’re the one to blame.



Here's an arrogant complaint that I can now make.

Rather than being a culture shock, the so-called privileged life of upper echelons doesn't even seem to be all that special.

With the exception of Maria's aggressive advances and Dorothy's persistent harassments, the life in this mansion is monotonous. It's so tedious that it feels like I'm being imprisoned here.

The daily life of idling away each day without any responsibilities like labour or studying. At this rate, I'll surely degenerate into a cancer of society that is no different than a NEET. Maybe I already have.

Well, for that reason...

I hereby declare this, here and now!

"Gaaaaah! I can't take being a Blackhazel anymore!"

"Onee-sama! I think he's finally gone insane!"

It's probably my imagination that you seem quite happy at the fact that I sound insane.

Anyway, Dorothy's sure-fire insults really are of the highest caliber in terms of bad attitude.

While pushing Dorothy away, who's pouncing on me like a baby tiger, I complain to Maria.

"Apart from stuffing down three meals a day into my mouth, all I do is fool around on the computer, locked up in my room! As if that wasn't bad enough, you won't even let me go sightseeing in this remote, mountainside! How am I supposed to live under such suffocating conditions?!"

Breathing heavily, I unload the chambered complaints on full-auto.

"Mmm. In regards to that matter, Onii-sama... It is painful for me, too"

Despite her words, Maria wipes her mouth with a napkin while maintaining her serene poker face.

"Then explain to me just why! My social life is one thing, but why would you keep me from going outside?!"

“T—that’s because...”

Strangely enough, at a loss for words, Maria dodges my question.

Eventually giving in to my quite temperamental demand, Maria opens her mouth hesitantly.

“To me, Onii-sama is the most precious person in the world.”

A momentary silence.

“But you’re telling me to neglect *that* Onii-sama to let him to play alone somewhere beyond the reach of my surveillance. In the event that I do such a thing, my heart will surely burst from anxiety and fear.”

“Pardon me?”

\**clink*\*

Setting down the black tea on the saucer, Maria adds placidly in a gentle voice.

“To be honest with you, I’m worried even now because I can’t take care of you with a leash around your neck.”

“Why don’t you just cut off all my limbs and look after me around the clock while you’re at it?!”

“My, that method doesn’t sound too...♡”

Opening her eyes wide in response to my rather appealing “suggestion”, Maria poses herself in a contemplative manner.

Whoa, that’s really creeping me out. She’s seriously thinking about it.

“Stop joking around with me! You see, I need a straight answer from y—  
*OOMPH?!*”

“Don’t talk back to my dear Onee-sama!”

Before I can raise my voice, Dorothy’s missile drop-kick flies in from the sky at a terrifying speed.

\**CRRRACKKK!*\*



19

The sound of my bones shattering along with the chair reverberates in an upbeat melody.

After barely getting up on my feet, I straighten up my posture by pulling my aching bones together and point a finger at Dorothy.

“God damn, you little shorty! You got a case of rabies or something?!”

“*Grrrrr!*”

“GAH—?! Y-you just bit my hand!”

My goodness, I can’t tell you apart from a pack of wild dog.

Biting down hard on my hand, Dorothy refused to let go.

I swing my hand up and down in an effort to shake Dorothy off, but it’s not helping—her teeth are only sinking deeper and deeper into my skin. This kind of development is humorous only in cartoons; in reality, it’s pure gore!

“It hurts! I said it hurts, damn it! Somebody please help me!”

“Dorothy... Would you stop it for a moment?”

As though she came to a decision, Maria stops her meal and puts the fork down gently on the rim of the plate.

Obeying Maria’s restraint, Dorothy finally loosens her jaw and walks away to her seat. It’s quite frightening, the way she’s smacking her lips and looking this way with the corner of her eyes like she still haven’t had enough.

“In truth, there is a reason why I restrict Onii-sama’s freedom out of my concern for you.”

“A reason?”

I really hope it’s not something like “my blood boils when I see you with another girl” or anything risqué like that.

“Currently, there are those who are after your life.”

“What?”

I tilt my head sideways, failing to understand the meaning of those words.

There are people after my life?

What are you talking about? Are you saying I'll become a leader of a resistance movement that will fight against artificially intelligent machines?

"This is not a joke. I just didn't inform you because I was worried about the shock that you might receive. Our security department has already captured and suppressed multiple assassination attempts before they could be carried out."

And those attempts include sniping, bombing and disguised accidents. What is this, Baskin-Robbins<sup>9</sup>!?

"Err, wait a minute. You're joking, right? Why are those people after my life in the first place?!"

Nothing is making sense to me; it's completely foreign. Even those inane metaphysical philosophy discussions would make more sense than this.

"Well, it would be difficult to tell you exactly why since there are so many reasons."

"....."

In contrast to her words, Maria is absolutely impassive to the end.

"If I were to choose only one reason why, it would be because you are *my Onii-sama*."

Maria's transparent voice hung low and shook the floor with its weight. Uhmm... How should I answer here?

Since Maria's words are right in conclusion, should I apologize for my misunderstanding? Perhaps say stuff along the lines of "Haha, if you have to keep me in a cage for such sound reason, you're more than welcome to do so! Waitress, more fried dumplings<sup>10</sup> over here please!" to her? It doesn't feel quite right.

<sup>9</sup> Reference to the Baskin-Robbins' original 31 flavors when it first opened in 1945. Its concept was variety— you could have a different flavor every day of any month.

<sup>10</sup> Reference to the Korean vengeance film "Oldboy", where the main character is locked in a room for 15 years and is fed nothing but fried dumplings.

"Huh, now that's quite something."

I've already been stupefied out of my senses by the situation up until now, but honestly, all that seems like nothing in comparison to what I've just heard.

My life is in danger.

Why so?

Because I'm Maria Lunalady Blackhazel's 'Onii-sama', that's why.

Only for that reason alone.

It's a sudden development without any sign or foreshadowing whatsoever.

This is just complete nonsense.

And Dorothy—who would normally be throwing insults like, "Ha, serves you right! Why don't you just get stabbed already and drop dead!"—is being as quiet as a mouse, carefully studying Maria's countenance.

Frankly, *this* was the most shocking!

"Hm, okay. Fine. To summarize, I have to live here penned up forever because somebody is after my head. Is that right?"

"I don't think it'll be like that, though I can't say for sure."

You can't say for sure?

Doesn't that mean I'd have to spend my sweet youth stuck here in the mountains if things don't work out so well? I'm only 18, damn it! It's not like I'm some kind of a princess captured at a faraway demon castle.

If Maria's words are true, then my life is at stake. This is not a joking matter.

Furthermore, when I realized this was all because of someone else's actions, my emotions suddenly surged up inside me.

"Let me ask you one thing again."

"Yes?"

“Why did you bring me here?”

“.....”

Disheartened, Maria lowers her head, not being able to reply.

Seeing Maria in a dispirited state like now really pricks at my conscience. Nonetheless, that doesn't change the fact that I've been dragged to a remote country where my life is now being threatened.

And I can't keep fooling around with her volatile “my pace” like a marionette.

I'll say it straight out.

Here's my ultimatum.

“I'm going back to my motherland.”

“What do you mean? Onii-sama's motherland is here, Romania.”

“Like I said, I'm not your older brother!”

Maria flinches in surprise, trembling.

Perhaps I raised my voice a little too high.

But the lapse of Maria's mind is only momentary.

There's no longer any trace of confusion on her face as I carefully check her face.

“In all aspects, it was my decision that I have brought you here. A childish impulse, if you will.”

Instead, she responds with firm resolution.

“However, I have definitely not brought back the wrong person, nor was there any mistake about it. To me, there is only one Onii-sama in the world. There is no mistake about it.”

Reflected in her heterochromatic eyes are her own confidence and will—something no any other mortal person could ever obtain overnight.

“I am Maria Lunalady Blackhazel. The head of the all-powerful Blackhazel family, in sole control of all the wealth that exists in this world. The single direct descendent continuing the legacy of the Voivode of Wallachia<sup>11</sup>. She was one of the few, chosen from birth. An entity of absolute power, even ruling over the others who were also chosen from birth.”

She's what you'd call 'crème de la crème'.

Maria's words are not overstated in the slightest.

“And that girl's everything... Do you not want them, Onii-sama?”

“What...?”

“The only sacrifice Oni-sama has to make is to just give in to the whims of a little girl.”

The unexpected change of the flow in the conversation throws me off balance.

“In exchange, I will promise Onii-sama the authority over all the kingdoms of the world.”

“W-What are you talking about?”

“Riches beyond measure. The iron throne that will bring the world to its knees and under your command. The concupiscent feasts of lakes made with alcohol and trees made with meat<sup>12</sup>. Along with my body and heart. Such authority that even the devil in the desert<sup>13</sup> cannot covet will be put underneath Onii-sama's feet.”

“Err, body and heart? You're going overboard...”

“Please do not reject them. I have already decided from the beginning to dedicate my precious purity to Onii-sama.”

“PFFF—?!”

Although I wasn't drinking anything in particular, I have a hard time recollecting my composure from all the coughing.

<sup>11</sup> Most likely a reference to Vlad III, Prince of Wallachia.

<sup>12</sup> A rather long proverb from China... Those familiar with Romance of the Three Kingdoms may pick it up. (Although it took place before Sangokushi)

<sup>13</sup> Reference to the devil in the Temptation of Christ.

The contrast between her overwhelming charisma and the content of the conversation is far too great for me to comprehend.

Even if I heard the Catholic Pope allowing homosexuality, it wouldn't be as shocking as this.

It seems I'm not the only one taken aback by Maria's statement, judging from Dorothy's mouth lined with horror.

"Do my words sound like lies to you, Onii-sama?"

Not in the slightest.

Riches beyond measure. The iron throne that will bring the world to its knees and under my command— No matter how absurd the promise may be, it is possible for her to make it come true.

After all, she is the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 who can bring down the stars above if she so desires.

"Then, to you, do I look like a philanthropist who would give away everything to others without hesitation?"

"W-well..."

"I wonder if Onii-sama knows this by any chance."

Maria pauses for a moment to take a sip of coffee, and takes her time doing so. "According to the UN Security Council, in the event that there are more than 1000 annual casualties and the federal government forces engage in an armed conflict in any form, it is classified as a 'major armed conflict' and the legislative body is summoned to decide whether the deployment of Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) forces to the authority is necessary."

And the topic of this conversation is derailing yet again.

"And based on our independent statistics, there are about 31 cases of "major armed conflict" that are taking place in the four corners of the world as we speak. In the Kashmir region of the Indian subcontinent; Columbia's civil war, induced by rebel forces; trifles in Africa surrounding the mining rights to diamond deposits—the continent's most lucrative natural resource; down to bloody clashes among nations due to their religious antagonisms."

Nonetheless, having no power whatsoever, all I can do is listen.

“200,000 child soldiers lose their lives on the battlefield for nothing, and every day tens of thousands of refugees suffer from starvation and epidemic, and women and children are raped and killed. Those who are forced to work at a cannabis plantation in South America for the rest of their life are few of the lucky ones.”

“W-what are you—”

The moment I open my mouth, having completely lost the thread of conversation, Maria cuts me off and continues.

“Yes. Without doubt, this world is spiraling down into corruption. And to the weak in all this anguish, I can offer them salvation.”

“Salvation...?”

“Yes. I could become a saint for the weak in all this anguish if I wanted to, but I won’t; because I’m not a ‘philanthropist’ that could sacrifice everything out of hollow sympathy.”

“Ah.”

Only then I was finally able to see a fragment of Maria’s intention behind her words.

“A single conflict will bereave these countless people of their lives, family, and irreplaceable things they hold dear. But at the same time, they are opportunities to create a tremendous financial gain to ‘some people’.”

So, calamity brings birth to wealth.<sup>14</sup>

“Because of that we ignite even more conflicts, keep them burning, and lead this world down into corruption. We provide supplies to rebel forces that have lost their capacity to rebel, assassinate politicians who advocates policies against us, and proxy for battles themselves as required.”

In short, they are merchants of death.

<sup>14</sup> Both calamity (災禍) and wealth (財貨) are pronounced “jae-hwa” in Korean.

The international private military company Bandersnatch.

And the supreme existence that judges and forges ahead at the top of Bandersnatch.

—Commander Maria Lunalady Blackhazel.

The 《Princess of Pure Darkness》that reigns over with dignified and deathly charisma.

Not once will she look down to the despairs and cries of countless people in the pits of hell. Not to turn a blind eye, but to simply search for a way to do business.

That's all it comes down to—a business.

Her eyes are terrifyingly cold, like looking down into an abyss.

Unlike those nouveau riches that raked in wealth indiscriminately against morals, she was a being beyond humankind that had no divide between good and evil from the very start.

**“Do you understand, Onii-sama? I will not treat even a single gold coin lightly, swayed by trivial feelings of altruism such as sympathy or compassion.”<sup>15</sup>**

As I came to my sense, the pace of the conversation was already in Maria's grasp.

“I decide and set their values, purely according to the logical scale of reason.”

Now under Maria's control again, the atmosphere inside Black Hazel Mansion was no different from the usual. Well, there might've been a subtle difference, but I'm not sure.

“And this is what I have to say to you. To me, all these sacrifices are worth enduring to obtain Onii-sama's heart.”

It's an embarrassing line normally said between two lovers. But if you take the weight behind her words into account, it's neither a flattery nor a sweet talk.

<sup>15</sup> Reference to “The Model Millionaire” written by Oscar Wilde, where the main character gives a gold coin (sovereign) to a beggar out of pity.

“Because...”

Right now I'm overwhelmed by her resolve, and all I can do is to remain silent.

Observing my reaction closely, Maria proceeds in a low voice.

It won't feel real no matter how many times I hear it; however, as long as I'm here, it's an inevitable fate.

“You are my precious Onii-sama, the one and only.”



In the end, the volatile atmosphere was reversed. It petered out to nothing, and none of the real issues were settled.

I return to my room after finishing the meal quietly. Then, as per usual, I turn on the computer and check the responses to my post on the bulletin forum.

Subject: Huh... hey guys Maria Blackhazel says that Im her Onii-sama lol.txt  
Nickname: asdf

Body: So was it two weeks ago? Maria suddenly barged into the classroom and called me Onii-sama and dragged me to her mansion in Romania lolololol  
Maria is my little sister lolololol

IP Address 000.000.000.000  
202X-0X-27 18:46:07

<sup>16</sup> Short for “Dungeon Fighter”. This sentence is a reference to the game-breaking event “Kiri’s Promise & Faith”, where players were able obtain +11+14 items without breaking them by using premium currency.

"Man, have you guys been tricked all your life? Why can't you trust what people say?"

Scratching the back of my head, I whine and complain.

\*click click\*

I keep clicking the mouse, but the next page takes more than five minutes to load.

As it already stands, this city of Brașov is a backcountry stuck in a remote area of Carpathian Mountains.

Of course the Internet—the fruit of our cutting-edge civilization—is going to be several times slower compared to Korea.

Okay, I understand that the network infrastructure is seriously underdeveloped here. But my god, this is way too slow.

No matter how hard I try, I can't get used to the speed at all.

I sigh quietly and take a bite out of the vanilla madeleine that I had stored away as a snack a while ago.

It's redundant even to mention it, but it's delicious.

Although I've never had a fine sense of taste, the culinary skill here is so sublime that even I can tell the difference. The foods here at the mansion have always been top-notch, prepared in-house by first-class chefs with great devotion.

As for me, I do nothing but stuff food down my throat and sit around all day long.

I don't know why I have to keep suffering from feelings of guilt like this.

That's right.

What happened a while ago was a pretty big incident in its own way, but in retrospect, none of the real issues were settled.

As I wait for the site page on the screen to load, lost in inane thoughts, someone knocks on the door.

\*knock knock\*

Before I can even ask who it is, the girl opens the door and enters the room. It's Maria.

"Maria?"

Her hair was wet with moisture as though she had just finished taking a shower, and she was wearing a rather large white shirt for her frame that exposed her sharp collarbone.

Oh my God, we're doomed!<sup>17</sup>

"It seems you're not in bed yet."

Maria sits shyly on the bed and begins to speak.

"Well, it's not even...ten o'clock yet."

Taking a glance at Maria's snow-white thighs, I lightly shake my head.

And what's more, because the baggy shirt is covering her bottoms, I can't tell if she's wearing underwear or hot-pants underneath.

Generally, there's a limit to how defenseless you can be.

Even if it's true that I'm Maria's older brother, the gap created by time and cultural difference isn't something you can disregard by any means. So please keep that cheeky coquettishness of yours in check!

I try hard to maintain my composure as my mind becomes flooded with thoughts.

Then, sitting on the bed, Maria carefully opens her mouth again.

"I would like to apologize for the incident earlier. I was somewhat agitated and wasn't quite myself."

"Y-Yeah, I was kind of surprised."

<sup>17</sup> A line from horrible Korean dub in Half Life 1, replaced with the original line in English.

The awkward silence falls over the room. Contrary to my expectation of her immediate response, Maria is hesitant and she just keeps staring this way nervously.

Gold and blue.

A different hue resides in each of her heterochromatic eyes.

But the overwhelming dignity and pride she showed earlier were nowhere to be seen. Instead, those eyes were lost, wavering in a sea of anxiety.

What is it that Maria wants to say?

Eventually, Maria breaks the silence.

“Do you despise the way I am, Onii-sama?”

“Huh?”

I’m not quite sure, but it appears she’s talking about the incident earlier.

The reconstruction of the food chain where the strong prey upon the weak, based on the distribution of wealth.

A lecture in regards to that law by the strong.

That the virtue of capitalism is not equal opportunities, but equal rights to move up on the food chain through accumulation of wealth.

“I won’t deny it. Surely, it could be that I have been defiled.”

“D-defiled?”

“If I had the will to do so, the world today would certainly have been a bit better.”

The world would have been a **bit** better, you say?

I can’t even begin to imagine the size of that scale.

“Well... I don’t think you need to blame yourself. And even so, you’re not the one at fault.”

And it's not like the world became like this in just a day or two.

"But..."

Not being able to continue with her words, Maria hangs her head down.

Again, the awkward silence falls over the room.

Seeing me not knowing what to do, Maria hesitates for a while before muttering in a whisper.

"From time to time, I'm scared beyond my wits' end."

"Maria, I told you that it's not your fault."

"That's not what I'm talking about."

"What?"

"I could care less about the world. The dead that condemns me in my dreams every night, the sea of blood from the bullet-riddled bodies we have killed, the weight of their grudge, and the fingers pointing the blame for the misery of the world; I do not care in the slightest."

Maria gently bites her lips and struggles through her words like a young girl in penance.

"What I really fear is not my ugliness or the world's blame, but the rejection that will come from Onii-sama because of those things."

"Reject you?"

I tilt my head sideways a little.

"Yes. What if I might incur Onii-sama's hatred? Whenever I become weighted with such thought, it pains my heart to the point of breaking."

Like a child having done something wrong, she's looking downward at the floor.

She's not the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 that everyone knew.

She's just a delicate 17-year-old girl in pain because she couldn't read the mind of the person she admires.

"So please tell me, Onii-sama. Does Onii-sama truly despise this ugliness of mine?! And, if you do, if you truly do...!"

It really is an unfamiliar sight you can't get used to.

"Then I..."

"I don't."

"...Y-Yes?"

Due to my unexpected interruption, Maria replies back with a surprised look on her face.

But I don't need to hear any more of this. To be honest, well, my answer is already decided at this point.

"I'm not trying to say that I dislike you in particular."

I don't have a special reason why.

It's just that I'm certain.

From Maria's wholehearted confession.

"You may think that you're a bad person, but I don't."

I'm not trying to be noble here, with morals and ethics and whatnot.

At least, this is what I believe to be so.

"And..."

Embarrassed, I scratch my cheek.

"No matter how 'defiled' you are, I will never come to hate you."

Why though?

Was it just a change of heart from seeing Maria in such a vulnerable state?

I'm not sure.

Maria's plea reflected in her desperate eyes is the only thing I can ascertain.

It was just moments ago that I was strutting about how I was returning to Korea, but now the ball's in her court.

"Onii...sama?"

Maria blinks with her eyes wide open like a surprised puppy.

"What I wanted to say was that I'm unhappy with the present situation and treatment. I didn't mean that I'd leave the mansion because I hate you, Maria."

"I see."

Relieved, Maria smiled sweetly.

That's right.

There's no change in the way things are now, but the important thing is my mental attitude in the end.

And do I really have an urgent reason to go back to Korea? It's not like I have any friends or relatives there, or an apartment of my dreams that I'd prepared. And wasn't I living a hard life? On top of attending high school, I was working part-time every day just to earn enough money for the monthly rent.

I am kind of worried as to how I'll get back the deposit money for the monthly rent due next month from the landlord, but in the end, it's only these kind of things.

"By the way, Onii-sama..."

"Yeah?"

It was when I was thinking this and that sort of things.

"There's one thing I'd like to correct."

"One thing you'd like to correct?"

"I've said it myself that I was "defiled" a moment ago, right?"

“What? Ah, yeah.”

Does she still have more to say?

“Actually, strictly speaking, that was about 50% wrong.”

Just what does she mean now?

“My body hasn’t been defiled yet by anybody, and it’s still pure.”

“W-What?”

My god.

I knew she wouldn’t let this end peacefully. She just had to spoil it at the last moment.

Raising the lower hem of her white shirt, Maria smiles flirtatiously. What I see below her raised skirt is, as one would expect, an undergarment. To boot, it’s a Western-styled undergarment that maximizes a girl’s femininity—a lingerie.

Well, of course. Now that I think using common sense, I’ve never heard of a weird after-shower-look that combines shirt and hot-pants together.

“But, if it’s Onii-sama, I would gladly allow you. No, it has to be Onii-sama! If it’s you, then it’s okay to mess up and break my body.”

“Whoa! Hey, w-wait! Weren’t we about to finish this like a nice and warm drama?! I don’t get why it’s going off-topic like this!”

“Not at all, I heard this normally happens in bishoujo simulation ga—I-I mean, ahem! I understand this is a normal development between two lovers.”

Hey, you were about to say something very obscure, weren’t you?

“I’ve never heard of such strange development and, leaving that aside, we aren’t even lovers!”

“Now! Please dye my purity blood-red and make it all wet♪”

“Stop! Where’s the rating board?! I’d like to report a violation of regulatory law here!”

And more importantly, stop unbuttoning your shirt!

This light novel is rated PG-13, not R!

It was when I was trying to stop Maria with all my might.

As though my words have finally reached her, Maria stops what she's doing and hesitates momentarily.

I take a sip of coffee on the desk to quench my thirst while I wait for Maria's next words. Then...

“Onii-sama, are you perhaps sexually disabled?”

“PFFFFFFF—?!”

What do you mean I'm sterile?!<sup>18</sup>

Those are some catastrophic words.

I spit out the coffee on the computer screen. But there's only a slight blush on Maria's face; her voice and nonchalant poker face remains the same as usual.

“Despite my aggressive advances against my own embarrassment, you are still unresponsive. I can only conclude that there is a problem with Onii-sama's reproductive function.”

“Wait a minute. Don't you think those aggressive advances are the problems here?”

“What do you mean? I assure you that my actions are based on verified and credible data.”

That credible data wouldn't happen to be from bishoujo games, would it?!

“And I heard that men's masturbation is where you ‘extract’ periodically on an average of once every three days. However, ever since Onii-sama came here, you have not released any— any drop of semen.”

“W-What?”

<sup>18</sup> Reference to an old Korean drama “Rustic Period”, where a male character becomes sterile after an accident involving his Johnson. In the video clip, after being informed by the doctor that his Johnson is now impotent, he cries out to himself “[What do you mean] I'm sterile?!”

I don't know about the first part, but the second one might be quite— wait, what am I saying?!

"If that is true..."

"If that's true?! I'm a perfectly healthy guy, so don't mind it!"

"Weak as I am, please let me be of assistance, Onii-sama...!"

"H-hold on! Just listen to me!"

Really, what on earth does she mean by 'be of assistance'?

My face flushes red from an unwholesome imagination, which I shouldn't have thought of.

To boot, with the image of Maria who's coming this way with a determined look.

"S-stop! Okay, that's good! Let's wrap up for today, director! Ahaha, good work today, everyone!"

"Excessive abstinence is not good for you; it's been proven medically, Onii-sama! Please let this weak girl lend you a 'hand'!"

"J-just wait! Please let's talk this over rationally!"

It'll be a bad end if I tell her that I'll do it alone.

It'll definitely be a bad end if I ask her to help me or such things.

It'll also be a bad end if I just let her go and get branded as being sterile.

"Hey, just wait! I think there's a huge misunderstanding here on your part. You see, I'm a perfectly fine male!"

"Then how come, for the past two weeks, you haven't..."

"Hey, would you do that kind of thing at someone else's house?! You'd have to be insane to try it in the first place!"

"What do you mean? This place is your house. Besides, masturbation is nothing to be ashamed of. **Sometimes, while thinking of Onii-sama, even I...♡**"

"Whoa, too much information!"

"Then, Onii-sama, you're saying there really isn't a problem, right?"

"Yes, yes! So please, you don't have to mind any unnecessary attention."

You really don't!

"Okay..."

I've managed to avoid the bad ends. Thanks to my defiant refusal, I got past the worst of it.

With a wistful look on her face—though I don't know what she's got to be wistful about—Maria continues to speak.

"Since Onii-sama is so stubborn about his chastity, I will overlook this matter for today. However Onii-sama, if you do not provide a sufficient proof of your health in the near future..."

"I-if I don't?"

"I will make sure that you do, by force if necessary. So, please prepare yourself."

Leaving such spine-chilling words behind, Maria got up leisurely from her seat.

/003.

It's the following morning after the chaotic storm had swept through my evening.

Maria's step to solving my 'unhappiness with the present situation and treatment' that I talked about yesterday was quickly revealed to me in full detail.

"Allow me to introduce her to you. This child's name is Lily, and she will be in charge of Onii-sama's personal security from now on."

"What?"

I observed the little girl from head to toe, with a look of disbelief on my face.



Wearing a black patent leather trench coat over the outfit with a design reminiscent of a Nazi officer's uniform and a violin case on her back, the little girl is just staring blankly into space with her eyes devoid of emotion.

Somehow, she doesn't seem human. Instead, the little girl is like an exquisitely crafted French wax figure.

That's exactly the problem.

"H-hold on a second. Are you telling me that this little kid is going to be in charge of my security?"

Could it be that she's displeased with my open finger-pointing and blunt, ignoring attitude? The little girl named Lily mutters something and puffs up her cheeks, pouting.

"Hmph. Lily, not a... little kid."

Perhaps it's due to the way she skips and pauses her sentence; she has a unique style of speech where the context feels somewhat disjointed.

Such minor idiosyncrasy doesn't make any difference to me, though.

"Ha! No matter how I look, your body's only half my size! If you're not a little kid, what are you then? A peanut?!"

Here's a typical loser, strong against the weak and weak against the strong.

Yes, siree, I'm here.

"Uu, hauu..."

"Lily is one of the top agents we Bandersnatch take pride in. It's not a good habit to judge people based on their appearances, Onii-sama."

Dorothy, who was listening closely in silence, jumps into our conversation.

"It would seem a good beating is needed to knock some sense into him, Onee-sama."

"You're the one who needs a good beating, you damn little sister."

"Lily! Darkness angel gigantic typhoon!"

"What the hell are you—"

Before I could finish, my body rattles to a halt.

Lily was already behind me with her arms coiled around my shoulder joint.

Then, with a sound cracking noise, my shoulder twists 90 degrees.

A mountain of pain and a river of tears.

It's somewhere along those metaphors.

I've realized it too late. If I follow my previous logic, I should have never stood up against that little girl.

Please forgive my impudence, ma'am.

You see it all the time; a lone hero, with nothing to protect himself, beats up an entire mob of gangsters in the blink of an eye. It's a cliché you often see in action movies.

"Lily will be assigned as Onii-sama's personal bodyguard. From now on, with the condition that you're accompanied by Lily, Onii-sama should be able to do things freely."

"Ah, alright."

"Also, you will be attending 'school' right away the day after tomorrow. Since I've already finished your transfer a few days ago."

Finished my transfer a few days ago?

It was just the day before yesterday that I declared I'll stop living a life of imprisonment that has been going on for nearly two weeks. Then was Maria waiting for this sort of situation to happen from the beginning?

In the end, it just reminds me of the pointless commotion I caused yesterday night, and how downright embarrassing it was.

As I nod my head lost in trivial thoughts, Dorothy barges in, shattering the mood as if it was made out of cheap Chinese glass.

"W-wait a minute... Onee-sama? You're not letting that stupid idiot attend Illuminati Foundation Academy, are you?

The school name evokes an extremely conspiratorial secret society. Like, as if they'd be doing shady religious rituals instead of classes.

"Is there a problem with that, Dorothy?"

"I'll definitely die from embarrassment if that idiot goes to the same school as me!"

"Well, it's not like I'll be enjoying your company!"

"Hmph, I know you're actually happy that you get to attend school with a beautiful girl like me."

Somebody please do something about her bishoujo complex.

Dorothy, whose face is full of complaint as usual, is assisted by Lily.

"...Lily too, being with that idiot, embarrassing..."

"Ahhh, Lily! You're so cute~♡"

Dorothy hugs Lily and rubs her cheeks against her. Despite Dorothy's fierce skinship, Lily maintains her poker face with a blank expression.

Seeing how the situation is going, it appears they're working together in making me look stupid. No matter how much I try to think of a good motive to this, the only conclusion that I can comes up with is:

Just what have I done wrong?

"Are you guys just trolling me right now?!"

"Yeah. You got a problem?"

"...There's, no problem."

Perhaps it was unnecessary for me confirm it, since I already knew that much. But still, it's a little sad hearing it directly from them.

Was it because she couldn't bear the sight of me being torn apart by the two? Eventually, Maria joins in to say her share.

"Both of you, do not speak too harshly of Onii-sama."

Nice artillery support.

With just her joining in, Maria's influence turns the tide of the war in a blink of an eye; that's how overwhelming she is.

It's overpowering. If I could use an analogy, it'd be like when the U.S. joined World War II, as a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Hiding behind her back with my eyes full of expectation, I root for Maria and her words.

"His table manners are indeed disastrous. He certainly doesn't have a single ounce of elegance as a Blackhazel. And it is true that half of his blood is that of the inferior Yellow race. Even then... He is our one and only Onii-sama!"

Oh my, such encouraging words they are!

...Wait.

"Maria, I never thought you'd be mean to me as well!"

Like a seven-year-old kid running away from a bully, I run into my room with tears streaming down with my face.

## II . Lily :: Who is she?

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/001.

Seaside raging with the tidal waves. Seagulls flying against the cloudless sky. A lighthouse of pure white standing resolute not far away.

Marseille, the port city of France.

Located not too far away from there is an artificial island that Illuminati Foundation Academy is located in.

“Still, I can’t believe we’re commuting to school by helicopter, hmm...”

What’s even more surprising is the fact that the school has number of helipads prepared inside, like a parking lot. Moreover, nobody finds that even slightly out of the ordinary. That’s right, because this school exists for ‘those kind of people’.

It’s a garden for those standing at the top of capitalistic society’s pyramid.

I’m not just talking about the amount of wealth they have. Social recognition, family heritage—. Strict and complex standards you can’t ever hope to get overnight by striking lucky at a lottery or stock trading. It’s an exclusive private school that only recognized upper class meeting those complicated standards can enroll into.

Once again, I marvel at the school facilities in awe.

“Hmph, let’s see how long you can last here.”

As if she’s displeased by my action, Dorothy, who’s sitting across from me, snaps at me in a cold manner.

“Also, this school uses French as its official language. So don’t even dream about speaking in Korean. *D'accord?*”

“*Um, mais je ne parle pas français. Alors, c'est impossible.*”

“*Quel idiot! Oh là là!*”

Derisively, Dorothy laughs maliciously at me.

She has fluent pronunciation and accent, naturally articulating the long vowels—the most distinct characteristic of the French language, which is primarily based on Latin. In comparison, my pronunciation is one thing, but even the basic communication is impossible for me.

I know how to say “I don’t speak French,” and that’s pretty much it.

Anyway, despite her nasty personality and being terminally ill with bishoujo complex, even Dorothy’s a ‘Blackhazel’. So, in a certain sense, it wouldn’t be strange at all if she was a real princess.

With the ability to speak three or four languages as fluently as her native language, she’s essentially of different caliber from ordinary people.

“Man, my future’s looking pretty damn bleak.”

Drowning in my depression, I mumble to myself with a sense of failure.

“That, your life...”

As if she was waiting for it, the new face who takes a cheap shot at me right from the adjacent seat is none other than Lily, who’s in charge of my personal security. She’s apparently the strongest agent that Bandersnatch takes pride in.

Although I find that hard to believe, that’s what Maria told me.

And for some reason, she’s wearing the same uniform as Dorothy and me.

I ask around why, but there’s only one answer. It’s planned that this shorty here will also be transferring into the same school as me under the pretense of “entering high school early due to Blackhazel family’s sponsorship”. However, in reality, it’s for my security on the school grounds.

Just who could this little kid ever hope to protect?

It was just two days ago that I had a disjointed shoulder, but here I go again complaining so carefreely like nothing happened.

“Anyhow, this is quite the trouble...”

From what I heard, unlike in Korea where all the classes take place in one room, the European school utilizes a system where you go to the lecture room yourself for the class, similar to how they do it in university<sup>1</sup>. Though, I can't say for sure because it's not like I graduated from one.

It probably won't be easy befriending my classmates, either.

I'm not really a megalomaniacal or an introverted person, but that doesn't necessarily mean I'm a sociable fellow who can just strike up a conversation and makes friends instantly.

It's fortunate that there's a thing called homeroom. I'm sure I can at least manage to introduce myself in front of the class.

...Wait, now that I think about it, it's not that fortunate since I can't even communicate with them in the first place.

The helicopter lands with an ear-splitting roar, and I get off. Making sure that the necktie or any ends of the clothing doesn't get caught by the propeller, I lower my body and proceed carefully into the school building.

At last, I can feel the air inside the school.

Dorothy disappears to her classroom without saying anything like the cold-hearted brat she is. Putting aside Lily who's right behind my tail with her mouth glued shut, the feeling of freedom that I have not experienced for ages finally sinks in.

Like Tim Robbins rejoicing his freedom with both arms stretched out at the climax in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Coming back to reality, the first place I have to find for now is the staff room. *Salle des professeurs*. Packed inside the notepad that I took out from my pocket is the minimal vocabulary one should basically know. Using that vocabulary as my compass, I systematically start to organize the stuff I have to do from now on.

As I stand there flipping through the notebook with my head shoved into it, I hear a voice of an unfamiliar girl from behind me.

It's not Lily.

<sup>1</sup> Unlike the American schools where students go to teachers for the lesson, in Korea (like Japan) teachers come to students for the lesson. Though most of you should know this by now...

*“Excusé -moi, monsieur. Est-ce que vous êtes Japonais?”*

“Hm?”

I turn my head around. There, I see an oriental girl who seems to be from a foreign country.

Short, silky black hair and well-defined facial features; with an ambiance of tranquility and reticence, she's the Oriental archetype of an ojou-sama.

Anyway, I have no idea what she just asked me. Comprehending a language isn't something that can be accomplished in a day or two. If it was that easy, I wouldn't be struggling like this in the first place.

*“Um... I’m Korean. I’m Kimchi man<sup>2</sup>. Do you know Kimchi? It’s very delicious and perfect food! And we have Park’s right leg<sup>3</sup> and Kim Yuna’s<sup>4</sup>...”*

What am I even rambling about right now?

“Ah, you were Korean!”

By comparison, the girl can naturally change languages with a flick of a switch.

“Uh, yeah. I see you also speak Korean.”

“Maybe it was because you were of mixed-blood, but discerning your lineage was difficult. So I guessed that you were perhaps Japanese, uuu...”

Twirling her body as though she's embarrassed, the girl explains herself.

I've also heard from somewhere that generally a lot of Japanese people intermarry with Caucasians. It was about an extension of eugenic policy in the old times or something.

“Still, it sure is pleasant meeting with another fellow Asian. It’s rare to see any people from the East here.”

<sup>2</sup> Kimchi man: Reference to a racist remark made by a Caucasian SC player IdrA in Starleague. Jokingly, the insult has now become a derogatory term for Korean males.

<sup>3</sup> Reference to South Korean soccer player Park Ji-Sung.

<sup>4</sup> A famous South Korean figure skater

"Ahaha. Well, I guess that's how it is around this neighbourhood."

Unable to find anything particular to say, I go along with the flow, laughing.

"I'm Sara Lin. I am a Chinese American."

"I'm Siyoung. I just happen to transfer into your school today."

"Ah, then what about that little girl behind you...?"

Sara points her finger to Lily, who's hiding behind my back with her head poking out like a scared little kitty.

Seriously? You're supposed to be my personal bodyguard, remember? What am I supposed to do if you're afraid of strangers?

As I'm looking at Lily with such thoughts, she gently lowers her head with a gloomy look on her face. Those dreary eyes of hers hidden by the shadow seem to convey a miserable situation. Under the darkened atmosphere, Lily whispers in a subdued voice.

"Lily, ...Master's lust disposal pet."

"E-Eh?!"

"W-Wait, what?"

What in God's name are you saying?!

But still, there's no way she would actually believe that nonsense.

Nah... She can't... But if by some odd chance she did...

"P-p-pervert—! Human trash! Hentai! Savage! Rapist! Pedophile!"

\*SLAP!\*

After slapping me across the face with her might, Sara turns around on the spot and runs away toward the opposite end of the hallway.

With a reddened cheek, I look back in a dazed state to the very girl who demoted the intimacy level I have painfully built up to a minus within seconds.

No matter how hard I look, there's not a single trace of guilt on her face.

"Fu."

Making a V-sign with her fingers teasingly, she seems to be enjoying her moment of glory.

Really, I've never seen a little devil like her.

To the point where it leads me to believe Dorothy is sisters with her, and not Maria.

Now that I think about my days ahead living amidst these devils, it seems hopeless already.

It's so devoid of hope that there isn't even a glimmer of light anywhere.



Tell them I've had a wonderful life.

This is what Austrian-borne philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who opened a new horizon of analytic philosophy in the Anglo-American world, once said.

And there are two reasons why I'm talking about his story here.

Firstly, because that statement is very fitting to use as one's last words. In fact, they were his last words.

Secondly, because the first class I just had here in Illuminati Foundation Academy was "Correlation of Wittgenstein's Latter Philosophy's Ideological Perspective and Modern Anglo-American Philosophy".

Yep.

This is exactly the problem here.

"What kind of a mad school on earth teaches this stuff to an 18-year-old high school student?!"

“Heh~ It’s not the school’s fault that you’re so stupid.”

I turn my head around to hear the familiar sarcasm, and like a bolt from the blue, Dorothy was sitting beside me.

“W-what the? Why are you even here?”

Instead of answering, Dorothy takes out a textbook and a notepad from her bag. The textbook has the same grand title as the lesson I’m about learn in this class room: “Dissertation of Abstract Algebra Based on Ideal Theory and Hyper-complex Number Theory”.

“Hmph, aren’t you embarrassed that you’re being held back a year and attending the same class as fifth graders?”

“No, not really.”

“...An idiot, not embarrassed when he’s taking a same class with a 12-year-old.”

“Haha, damn right! You know what they say, ignorance is bliss!”

Well, that’s not really something to boast about.

But I feel proud for some unknown reason.

As we waste our time bickering about back and forth, we realize we’ve become the center of attention in the classroom.

It’s pretty obvious when you think about it.

Even if this place is teeming with second-generation magnates from around the world, the Blackhazel name stands above the rest. It’s well beyond any comparison.

Not only that, Lily’s a little kid who’d be barely graduating from elementary school right now. The fact alone that she understands the lectures intended for 18-year-olds at this school without much trouble is more than enough to draw attention from others.

And, ironically, the one who’s attracting the most attention is me.

Probably they're thinking how a run-of-the-mill, average-looking guy like me can talk openly with such prominent members of the Blackhazel family.

That's to be expected; that's how public attention works. The focus of the spotlight is always towards, not the celebrity, but the ordinary person related to the celebrity.

Well, whatever. I don't really care about the sociopsychological analysis.

What's bothering me the most right now is not Dorothy, Lily or the mobs of classmates that have their attention on us. It's not like I have such a delicate personality that would be pressured by unnecessary attention.

The problem lies elsewhere.

I'm talking about the girl sitting in the corner of the classroom, the one that's looking out the window indifferently as if to say she has no interest in the commotion over here.

At the second our eyes meet purely by chance, the girl frowns at me in plain sight like she has just seen an insect and turns away her head.

It's Sara Lin.

"Ugh..."

Just what kind of fictitious image does she have of me inside her mind? It already makes me feel uneasy thinking about the misunderstanding she could have thought up.

I can't get it off my mind, it's driving me insane.

There's about five minutes left before the teacher comes in and starts the lesson.

I can't decide whether I should approach her and clear up the misunderstanding in the meantime or leave it as it is and find the right time later.

—.

Oh, what the hell.

I push the chair back, stand up, and head toward the corner where Sara is sitting. She makes a startled face upon seeing me coming towards her, and clears her throat right away, struggling to maintain her composure.

“Um, Miss Sara?”

“Would you please not talk to me? Jinmenjūshin-kun<sup>1</sup>. ”

What a wonderful name.

“Well actually, that’s exactly what I need to talk to you about...”

“I won’t hear any excuses for your immoral deeds! How can you commit such heinous acts like they’re nothing in human clothing?! Ahem!”

Man, I’m getting lectured here.

“Like I was trying to say, it was all a lie in the first place! I’m telling you, it’s a joke that shorty thought of to prank me! Please belie— *Mmph?!* *Mmph—!*”

“You should never believe what this savage says!”

It was at that moment.

Dorothy suddenly gags me and cuts in to my conversation with Sara Lin.

“M-Miss Dorothy.....?!”

“Ahh, poor Lily! You must be in such unbearable agony enduring all those sorts of obscene and vicious sexual tortures from this savage every night!”

“*Mmph?!* *Mmm, mmph!* *Mmmph!*”

Are you out of your mind? You’re spewing nonsense like it’s the damn truth!

I try to remove Dorothy’s hands that are covering my mouth to deny her words as soon as possible... But I can’t even get them to move an inch, it’s as though they’ve been glued on. Despite being a girl, she has ridiculous physical strength.

<sup>1</sup> Jinmenjūshin (人面獸心): Literally, a beast with a human face. Idiomatic equivalent of “Wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

"Having lost her parents at an early age, Lily was sold to this savage, and she grew up suffering from all kinds of abuse! Alas, her life is an endless living hell! O a thorny path of solitude!"

"Mmph?! Mmmph! Mmmph!"

What is this crazy @#\$%&!

Dorothy chatters away, putting emphasis into her nonsensical gibberish like some kind of a narrator in a pro-environmental documentary.

Then there is also Lily in Dorothy's arms with a tinge of sadness in her teary eyes reflecting a plea for sympathy. The way she turns her head obliquely at an angle 45 degrees accentuates the contrast between light and darkness, casting a fathomless shadow of her life.

"Good heavens—!"

Dorothy's verbose plead must have kicked in. Covering her mouth with tears in her eyes, Sara gently strokes Lily's cheek.

And this leads to the coup de grâce.

"Lily, this kind of life... I don't want it..."

Death Penalty.

A flawless straight punch that cleanly strikes out my life.

Is this how you girls are really going to act until the end?



In the end, I spent the whole class gazing aimlessly at the blackboard, zoning out.

Needless to say, I didn't understand a single word from the lesson that went on continuously for almost half a day.

Just what was Maria thinking, dropping me off into this monstrous place without any kind of safety measures? Or could this be the result of my unwarranted complaint about wanting to get out of here as soon as possible?

"No, let's just say that it doesn't matter."

Passing over the French border, I'm inside the helicopter that's returning to the Blackhazel Mansion in Romania.

I steal a glance at the two girls, Dorothy and Lily, sitting on the opposite side.

Leaning against each other's shoulders, the girls had fallen sound asleep.

They really are pretty as angels when they keep their mouths shut like this. But as soon they open their mouths, they change into vicious dogs... as per usual.

Rather than helping out her only brother, who has been thrown in this unforgiving jungle, she seems to be intent on pushing me off the cliff instead.

Also, on the top of the blacklist as the new dark horse, is the self-claimed lust disposal pet Lily.

She happens to be my "bodyguard".

Among many other words that still doesn't feel all that realistic to me, like "risk of assassination" and such, that one easily takes the cake.

That's right.

Despite of it all, it's the reality that I'm facing right in front of my eyes.

"Fu-nyan... Hauu, Onee-sama..."

Wriggling her arms and legs, Dorothy mumbles in her sleep. The sight of her drooling and smiling away happily gives me a headache just by looking.

That reminds me, there was a situation exactly like this one not long ago, except it was reversed.

I'm talking about the incident where she beat me to the ground when I tried to exact just revenge on her for smacking me in my sleep.

Now that I recall those terrifying memories, the thought of waking Dorothy up and taking my revenge seems scary to the point of being suicidal.

It's all just an amusing thought.

"How did things turn out like this, I wonder."

I mutter to myself. The helicopter pilot probably wouldn't be able to understand me, since he's a foreigner belonging to Bandersnatch.

Not that it makes any difference.

It's a little habit of mine.

It's just as the narrator Yōzō from Osamu Daizai's *No Longer Human* had said.

*"Everything passes."*



「We're a new family now, from this time onward.」

I can barely remember it right now, but when I was five-years old, I was adopted from a remote orphanage in the Far East by a pair of Korean parents.

The foster parents decided to adopt me after much consideration, thanks to the financial boon they gained from the real-estate industry.

The mother, who had congenital infertility, treated me as her own child from the bottom of her heart, and the kindness they showed was the only warmth that once made me feel like I had a place in this world.

Of course, that happiness didn't last for long.

The real estate bubble deflated because of the unreasonably low-interest policy; this equaled massive debts to the foster family, and at the same time the foster mother miraculously conceived a child of her own. However, drowning in an ocean of debts, the family wasn't in any financial condition to raise another life.

Her decision was abortion.

The foster father became a drunkard and a domestic violence offender, and the foster mother merely stood by and watched her husband.

Not long after, I broke free from that place and started to live on my own.

That wasn't a choice for me; I never had any to begin with. It was an inevitable act of survival, of whether I stayed and face death, or seek life elsewhere by escaping.

「It's not like he's my real son.」

The way I live my life right now originates from those words.

Anywhere I go, I'm an outsider.

There is no place for me, where I truly belong.

It's not just here in this city in the backcountry of Eastern Europe I feel that way.

I'm isolated from the world itself.

...Man, I know it's my own story, but I sound like a total badass. Like a private investigator from a hard-boiled fiction sinking in sorrow.

In the end, everything in this world is what you make of it.

Don't you agree?

—.

“Please tell me it's not true, Onii-samaaa!!”

The instant she hangs up the phone, Maria comes running towards me like she's in a 100-meter dash.

Her usual composed, intelligent poker-face is nowhere to be seen.

She tells me the call just now was from my homeroom teacher from the Illuminati Foundation Academy.

To summarize, it was probably an unnecessary advice along the lines of “Siyoung-kun's school life is this and that. So it would be better off for Siyoung-kun to just stay away from school and kill himself. ”

By the way, at the moment I'm having a peaceful supper with my two little sisters and Lily.

"Alas, I, Maria Lunalady Blackhazel, have finally found out!"

"F-find out what?!"

I ask her as I chew on the salmon sushi freshly made by a master in Japanese cuisine.

"The truth that Onii-sama is a lolicon who hides behind the utility pole every morning and lusts after elementary schoolgirls wearing little backpacks!"

"Hey, wait! On what grounds are you making such detailed description in your sentence?!"

"Don't deny it! My ~Operation: Doki Doki Conquer My Beloved Onii-sama!~ was definitely perfect! I would have seen the H-scenes with just few more clicks! Aaah, I was so close...!"

"W-what?"

What language are you even talking in?!

"Yes, my one and only mistake was my own prejudice! I carried out my plan on the premise that my Onii-sama would be a 'normal' person with 'normal' sexual desires!"

"Stop making it sound like I'm a hopeless pervert!"

But seeing Maria going off on her delusion at twice the normal rate, it may already be too late.

"Onii-sama, how could you! Doing \*BEEP\* and \*BEEEEP\* with a girl who's only 12 years old! And as if that wasn't enough, forcing her do \*BEEEEEP\* with her mouth! How envi... I-I mean, how immoral and shameless can you be!"

"Did you get food poisoning or something?! Why are you suddenly acting strange again?"

Wait, Maria just came back from answering a call. The one who should be at most risk is not Maria, but Dorothy, Lily and me.

“Why have you gone astray, Onii-sama?! Even though you have such a cute little sister like me...!”

“Don’t tell me you actually believe all that nonsense Lily’s been saying!”

Oh, Maria...

It seems you have absolute trust in her, judging from that serious look on your face. It saddens me to know that you have such little confidence in your older brother.

“And here, look! In terms of breasts, mine are way bigger and has volume to them! Why can’t Onii-sama recognize this sexual attractiveness of an adult?”

“W-whoa! Hey, are you crazy?! Don’t just start taking your clothes off all of a sudden!”

“With my breasts, it’s possible to do all sorts of play that Lily can’t even dream of! Like \*BEEP\* and \*BEEEEP\*! And even \*BEEEEEP\*!”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself! \*BEEP\* is done with your feelings, not your breasts!”

Hmm, why do I feel like I’m also off a few keys here?

Never mind, it must’ve been my imagination.

As I’m trying to escape from reality, Lily pokes her nose in without warning.

“Fufu. Girls...start withering at the age of twelve.”

“Stop fanning the flames! Moreover, that’s too early as a starting point! What is this, the Middle Ages?!”

Okay, it’s a bit of an understatement to say she’s “fanning”.

Because it’s equivalent to pouring industrial oil by the barrels down into the flames.

“F-fine, Lily. If that’s how you’re going to play, I have plans of my own as well.”

Placing her hand on forehead with faltering steps, Maria collects her composure.

It pains me to see her trying so hard to pretend that she's calm. Also, this doesn't bode too well, it's as though a rampage is about to happen.

"No, as I tried to say it before, this was a misunderstanding from the start! Does not listening to what other people say run in this family or something?!"

"Tonight, I will teach Onii-sama about the world of adults!"

"Please don't forget that you're still a child too!"

"T-then I'm still eligible for Onii-sama's lust after all...♡"

Maria begins to blush happily.

"If you even lay a finger on Onee-sama, I will turn you into minced meat, you pedophilic beast!"

Then, all of a sudden, I get hit by a missile dropkick from the sky coming from nowhere.

It was by Dorothy, who was listening to our conversation in silence. Man, why must I suffer from her primitive violence because of Maria's needless misunderstanding?

"No, no, you got it all wrong! For Christ's sake, would you please listen to what I've got say?!"

Continuing with the story...

"Please, Lily, this whole thing is spiraling out of control! Give them an explanation or something!"

"Lily's now a lewd little girl...who can't live on without master's domestication... ♪"

"Here, here! We have a spy here who's trying to overthrow the Blackhazel family!"

Despite the fact that I'm pointing it right out to her, Maria seems to be lost deep within her own delusion for her to think properly.

Damn, I'm fighting a losing battle here. My throat's starting to feel sore.

"Anyhow, listen to me very carefully. Okay, Maria?! By all means, I am not a pedophile and will never be one. So, further misunderstandings from here on are forbidden!"

"I don't believe you!"

"Then what are you going to do?!"

"Until I confirm Onii-sama's sexual preference, I will keep an eye on you twenty-four seven from your side!"

"I-it'd be uneasy for me as well to have Onee-sama stay beside a filthy pedophile! I want to do it, too!"

"...Lily's, this idiot's bodyguard."

From how my head is already starting to throb with pain, it would seem this isn't going to end all that well.

**/002.**

"I shall formally introduce her to you once more, Onii-sama."

In the midst of countless people watching her in awe, the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 slowly opens her mouth.

"This very child is the strongest agent that we Bandersnatch take pride in."

Looking this way indifferently from Maria's side, the eyes that Lily had were terrifying. Devoid of emotion, it was a pool of empty darkness that spiralled down endlessly.

She's not acting here.

It's not a practical joke she's pulling here to intimidate me.

“With the code name 《Feo Pafisto》, she is the fourth highest ranking officer of Ladies in Black — a multipurpose special forces under the direct control of the head of Blackhazel. I present to you...”

That's right.

“—Major Lily Shupiel.”

Those girls, so to speak, are residents of another world.



“Ahhh, no matter what clothes you wear, they all match you so well, Onii-sama!”

Do they really? Or is she just blinded by love? But in a certain sense, those words might be only natural since I'm wearing a handmade Italian designer suit with an asking price of tens of thousands of dollars.

It's an early morning at the Blackhazel mansion.

Today, Maria is attending an unofficial party for the members of polite society—Not because of her requirement as the present head of the Blackhazel family, but in response to an invitation from her personal acquaintance in the business side.

The event is being hosted on a five-star luxury cruise ship.

Should I say it's surprisingly plain? It really doesn't strike me as amazing, perhaps because it's on a scale within normal people's expectations. Just so that there is no misunderstanding, it's not from my personal point of view.

“Heh~. In the end, isn't it just casting pearls before swine?”

Donning a pair of black brand-name jeans, white blouse and black suit jacket on top, it's a casual look for Dorothy. As always, her choices in clothing are consistent and fashionable from the standpoint that there are no accessories with the exception of her necktie.

“These are not pearls but clothes, you damn little sister. So could you call your older brother a winged pig from now on?”

After all, fine clothes makes for fine wings.

Thanks to all the abuse I had taken, this doesn't even come off as self-deprecating. Instead, it's to the point where I think I got one back at Dorothy.

So, you should have a general idea of how low my rank is within this household.

With the final touch on Maria's evening dress by her personal coordinator, all preparations are complete.

"It seems we are all set to go."

Says Maria in a cheerful voice with her honey-blonde hair finely braided into a chignon pinned by an ornamental hairpin to match the formality of the occasion.

"Yes, Onee-sama!"

".....Lily, ready to launch."

Dorothy seems to be in a really good mood. Maybe it's because she's excited about going to the party today with her one and only Onee-sama. As proof, she's very much tame, unlike her usual impatient demeanor from not being able to harass me.

Just how tame, you ask? Although I'm sitting right next to her in the limousine, she wasn't even complaining about it.

If it was her usual self, she would've definitely been making all sorts of complaints and kicking me like a soccer ball.

"A party~♪ A joyful party with my Onee-sama~♪"

She's just humming a tune and smiling happily like a kid.

That has got to be it.

Without a doubt, this girl is just a kid.

It doesn't matter that she's a Blackhazel; in the end, Dorothy's just a 17-year-old girl, a year younger than me. She's clearly different from Maria who's been trained by years of social experience with her position as the present head of the family.

Well, anyone would think she's a normal girl too if they saw her acting this happy over a simple family trip.

In such thoughts, I look down on Dorothy with a wry smile of an adult.

But damn, I may have pushed my luck too far.

Leaning against the car window, Dorothy does a half turn and stomps down on my foot with all her strength.

“Gaaahhh!”

“You, your eyes are somehow arrogant.”

“Oh wow, now you’re just nitpicking!”

“I don’t like the way you talk, too.”

Double hit.

“And that sleazy attitude of yours, as well.”

Triple hit.

Along with the final blow, my head gets planted to the floor of the car. But my bodyguard Lily is just looking at me with a vacant stare, not saying a word and keeping silent.

“Hey! You’re my bodyguard, right?! Are you just going to keep watching?! I’m about to get beaten to death here!”

As I complain to Lily while looking up at her from my current position...

“.....Pff.”

She laughs at me.

You know, it’s not like I want a rough-looking black guy with the sunglasses and all as my bodyguard. In fact, a 12-year-old kid bodyguard isn’t so bad from the setting’s perspective.

What I want is very simple.

It's not that hard at all.

"Would you please at least pretend to protect me?!"

"Hmph..... You, an idiot?"

Coldly rejecting my desperate plea, Lily quickly turns her head away with an outright, displeased look on her face.

She does so flatly, without the slightest sign of regret or hesitation.



After taking a private jet from the Bucharest Otopeni International Airport, we land on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in Italy. Then switching to a limousine again, we ride to the Molo Beverello of Naples where the cruise ship holding the party is anchored.

It was quite late, and the view outside had changed into nightfall.

The Royal Caribbean International Freedom class cruise ship by the name of *Liberty of the Seas* was like an empire sailing on the sea.

Surprisingly plain? Within normal people's expectations? I was totally wrong about what I said before.

According to the schedule, the *Liberty of the Seas* is slated to set sail tonight and return to port 3 days later.

I'm already hyped up from the thought of enjoying the so-named "leisure of the upper echelons".

From its indoor facility designed for on-board swimming and sunbathing to the high-rise observation deck and dance hall for overlooking the Mediterranean Sea in the night.

This cruise ship has everything.

Also, a third-class room here is equivalent to a hotel's presidential suit. As for us, it looks like we're going to stay at a VVIP room.

Maria opens the door with the keycard, and I follow her into the room.

*Just how amazing can a lodging room get in the first place, huh?* — I almost feel stupid for thinking that.

“Wow.”

The living room evokes the interior of a 19th century royal Arabian palace, which became synonymous with pleasure and luxury. Sets of golden furniture and ceiling with harmonized curves and checks. Looking at the ornaments and pieces of furniture placed in the room, it's evident that they put a lot of effort in historical accuracy.

Already in the bedroom, Dorothy is jumping up and down happily on the double bed like a kid.

Not wanting to needlessly get involved with her and incur her wrath, I step outside to the balcony. Leaning my body against the railing, I enjoy the night air of the Mediterranean Sea.

It really makes my heart race.

If I knew it was going to be this awesome from the beginning, I wouldn't have made fun of Dorothy for acting like a kid. Because right now, my excitement level is over 9000.

Kids and adults are the same inside, so to speak. Well, it's not like I'm an adult, though.

“*I'm on a boat!*”

Sticking out the upper part of my body over the railing, I shout out to the world.

The night sea, glittering like the scales of a fish under the moonlight, touches the edge of the distant horizon with a dim glow. And every time the waves roll, the lights break into grains of white sand and scatter across the sea.

It's truly a captivating sight.

But if I were to fall into the open sea by accident, I'd sink like a brick for sure.

Of course there's no way a full-grown adult male would make that kind of a ridiculous mistake. Besides, it'd be impossible even if you wanted to unless this chest-high railing splits into two.

The problem in such case is that it would've been set up by somebody with ill intentions.

As soon as that thought enters my mind, a cold sweat runs down my back.

"Hmm... So if this unfolds as it always has in my life, there's no doubt that it's going to lead to disaster..."

But every cloud has a silver lining.

Keeping my composure in such situation, I notice the presence of a small, lit incandescent light bulb above my head.

"Die, you pedophilic beast—!"

As soon as the sound of air being cut is heard, I lower myself sideways and turn face about.

If Dorothy's ferocious flying kick land on me, then it would push me over into my watery grave.

However, if that kinetic energy's intended target were to disappear...

At this height, it's more than enough to make it work.

In other words, I can send this cyclonic flying kick into the open sea.

That's right.

This is what the small, lit incandescent light bulb above my head meant.

"Hagyuu?!"

Having jumped over the railing with great force, Dorothy twists her body around with all her strength while making a cute crying sound like a harp seal.

Eventually, she barely managed to grab and hang on to the outer edge of the balcony with her two arms, and..... Well, she was in a position that main characters in action movies often end up in.

But the problem is that this is real and not a scene from an action movie.

“Fugyaaaaah—!?”

Taking a glance at the surging waves down below, Dorothy's face turns pale.

She turns her head to look up, and there I am with a triumphant smile.

To her, this situation is a pure nightmare.

“P-please help me!”

And this is coming from the person who tried to kill me? You sure have a lot of nerve.

“Hello, Dorothy.”

I lower my tone as much I can to produce a low, mechanical voice.

“O-Onii-san.....”

“I want to play a game.”

“W-wait! N-no! Anything but that...!”

It seems you know a fair share of horror movies.

But you have nothing to worry about, my dear Dorothy.

I actually don't like games that much.

So, in that sense...

“I'm just joking. Here, off you go!”

“Fu-nyan?! Kyaaaaah—!”

Swift and without delay.

\*splash\*

Leaving the pleasant echo of vengeance behind, I put my hands in my pockets and turn around, then walk away from the scene of the crime like a boss.



Unlike my wish, she didn't get eaten by the sharks and unfortunately came back alive.

She just came back with her whole body wrapped in seaweed and a cute octopus stuck to her head.

And how do you think the story progressed afterward?

Well, I'll leave that to your imagination.

/003.

Running away from Dorothy who seemed to be intent on flaying me alive, I arrive at the party on the dock, full of people socializing and enjoying themselves to the fullest. The best part of this cruise, I'd say.

The deck is bustling with the life of the party; there isn't even any room for me to slip in. A full moon shining in the sky and the sound of the waves tickle my senses. Gazing at the extravagant cuisine and the melodious music coming from the orchestra, I forget who I am momentarily and lose myself in a state of contemplation.

It's nearing midnight, and the party shows no sign of fading out.

"Lily, hungry..."

And then there's Lily, stuck to me like a magnet. She's tugging at my shirt sleeve, complaining about how hungry she is.

"Ah, ah, right. There's food all around us, so let's grab something to eat then."

To be honest, I was feeling a bit empty myself.

Going around the dance floor filled with people, we approach the buffet table located slightly off to the side.

Turkey, barbecue, ribs, all sorts of meat and seafood, western cuisine to Japanese, it's filled with food from all around the world that you can pick out however to your liking.

Restraining my watering mouth, I gather some of everything into my plate. Spaghetti, pizza, smoked salmon, kebab, roasted chicken...

Re-enacting the Leaning Tower of Pisa right on my plate and moving onto the Chinese food section, my hand accidentally run into someone who was confidentially going for the Chinese food as well.

“Uh, sorry about that”

Turning my head to apologize to whoever I bumped my hand int-

“Oh my God.”

Now I know what they mean when they say you can't run from fate in this world.

The reason being that beside me is Sara Rin, wearing a blood-red China dress laced with golden threads.

“Ji... Ji... Ji... Jinmenjūshin-kun?!”

Her face transforms into a look of pure unbelievable terror. Well, not just her face, mine too as well.

I guess it's not just Korea that's small...

“Shénmei shí?”

And running to Sara's direction is a gentleman of considerable age. Judging by his broad shoulder, I'm guessing he's no slouch when it comes to strength. Maybe he's a shaolin monk, perhaps?

“Méi shénme, Qing Long?”

A conversation in fluent Mandarin takes place. I can't understand what they're

saying, but from what Sara is gesturing to him, she's trying to say that this is nothing of importance.

So that makes the gentleman her bodyguard or some sort.

"So, what is Jinmenjūshin-kun doing here?

Sara asks in a venomous tone, without even attempting to mask her animosity toward me.

"Ah, ahahaha, well, stuff happened... Was that guy your bodyguard?"

"Qing Long (青龍) is a butler from my family."

Sara replies back in a cold tone, her words covered in numerous thorns.

Now that I think about it, Sara was an immigrant. Lin family must be a pretty high-up family to have a butler serving them.

"If we're done talking, then I'd like to leave."

She talks as if every second she spends on me is a second wasted; Sara turns away with no hesitation whatsoever.

But I can't let this end here.

All this disgust and contempt toward me began with a misunderstanding anyway. Now that Lily is distracted shoving food inside her like a vacuum cleaner, this is my chance to tell her what really happened.

I grab onto her shoulder to stop her from walking away.

"J-Just a second there!"

"Kyaa?! T, take your hand off me! Womanizer! Pedophiliac! Perverted sea anemone!"

"Uwahh?! S, sorry! I mean I have to tell you something, so just listen to me for a second!"

"Get away, you beast!"

With a shake of her shoulders, Sara walks away from me.

And so, I was left staring at her leaving without any progress in explaining myself whatsoever. I could have been just dumped by my imaginary girlfriend and even that wouldn't be as depressing as this.

“Haha.”

And there's Lily in contrast, who's already done with quite a few plates of food, busy stuffing herself.

Lily realizes that I'm staring at her and she slowly raises her head this way and stares at me.

There's still bit of rice around her mouth.

...I don't know what she ate to have rice around her mouth.

“So, having fun enjoying yourself with food while you watch me fall into the depths of hell?”

I spit out, realizing that possibly nothing could make my life even worse than what I'm feeling right now.

“Hmph, none for you...”

Lily answers, dragging the plate closer to her.

This troublesome midget is...

Way too easily distracted.



It was then, when the tightly-wrought tranquility of the party scene was pulled tight, like a string on a guitar of a musician.

Appearing from the shadow's guise, under the lobby was two sisters of the Blackhazel.

Maria and Dorothy.

Even in a place like this where only the highest of the high class could dare to appear, the weight those two carry is certainly an overwhelming one.

Enveloped in an evening-dress of purplish beauty, Maria receives the attention of everyone filled with adoration and admiration.

Beside her is Dorothy, who's probably using all her strength to look as dignified as possible.

“Aah, to meet the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 in the flesh, I feel like I’m dreaming!”

“Miss Dorothy looks wonderful beside the Princess as well!”

As the two enter the stage, the crowd of people around the Blackhazels disperse, making a circular barrier like protecting their queen.

“For the noble Blackhazels to visit our small party here, I give you my words of gratitude in place of everyone here.”

“The pleasure is ours, President Kaufmann. We are grateful for just being invited.”

Maria walks with him and talks about stories here and there. While Maria is talking about WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction) being researched and other war issues, I take a sit in a table away from them.

I’m not really interested in this adult business Maria is dealing with just for some attention from everyone, and I certainly don’t want to cause any problem as a “Blackhazel”.

“Yeah, at a time like this... munch munch... as an older brother... munch munch... I need to look out for my sister’s sake... munch munch...”

Immersed in my so-called mature considerations, I sit beside Lily and busily shove food into me like a vacuum cleaner. Though the sight of me wearing a fancy evening suit and eating away like a madman doesn’t appear as anything mature.

While I’m still immersed, a voice calls out to me.

“Aah, so you were there!

“Huh.”

Forget about me watching her talking with others; apparently she couldn’t care less about others and she was busily waving her hands at my direction.

All of a sudden, the flow of attention is directed towards me and the shady corner that I’m in.

Umm, Maria.

I don’t think this is a very good idea.

I secretly send a quick gesture towards Dorothy beside her, who was obviously panicking. At least now, I think we feel the same about what’s happening over here— is what I feel. A win-win strategy, perhaps?

But it wasn’t like she could do anything against Maria who just suddenly decided to act away out of the blues.

Maria hastily comes to the table where I am, and in response I stiffen like a frozen tuna in a fridge.

“You should’ve told me you were going to go out early! I was really worried because I couldn’t find my Onii-sama.”

She grabs my hand, an expression of genuine worry etched on her face. It’s like she just found me as a hostage being returned from an attempted kidnapping.

She at least seems to be glad that she found me, judging by that smile on her face.

At the same time, murmurs of suspicion spreads through the crowd like a wave.

“Who’s that Oriental?”

“Who exactly is he for Maria, the Blackhazel, to...”

“It’s my first time seeing his face too.”

“Perhaps he’s Sunwoo Family’s...”

Well, I expected this much.

Even I can read the mood here.

Those that are bound with connections do not approve of outsiders. In their eyes, it's clear that my existence is something of an irregularity here. That much I can read.

And even so, Maria is unfazed. She acts like the two of us are in a private dimension, away from everyone.

It's a bit different from not being able to read the mood.

"It looks like you are done with dinner."

"Er? Ahh, yeah, I am."

I couldn't bring myself to say "I still hunger for more" like Coach Hiddink<sup>1</sup> once said.

Maria stops herself for a moment and changes her attention towards the dance stage.

"Then, Onii-sama."

The moment she decided to speak, I should have deeply prayed that "Onii-sama" never reached the crowd's ears.

But maybe I didn't need to.

Maria gracefully lifts the hem of her skirt with her hands and bends her knees in deference.

"It is this lovelorn lady's small wish. Would you care to dance with me?"

What?

Considering the possibilities of what consequences that could have, it would be better to tell everyone here that I was her "Onii-sama". A hundred thousand times better.

Maria grabs my hand and half-drägs me to the middle of party, where the dance stage was located.

<sup>1</sup> A Dutch football manager who lead South Korea to a fourth place finish in the 2002 FIFA World Cup.

“W-Wait up! Maria! I don’t know a single thing about ballroom dancing!”

That was my excuse, but I doubt it would work against the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 over there.

“Relax and follow my lead, Onii-sama”

The way Maria spoke so eloquently; it’s dignified, sophisticated and beautiful as well, like how a queen would speak.

But follow her lead?

Isn’t that what men usually say?

“Modern Waltz is, with sufficient lead, is a dance anyone can participate in, even beginners.”

Maria lightly snaps her finger in the middle of the dance stage.

With that, the orchestra begins playing a light classical music, as if they were waiting for this moment.

She’s not listening to me.

Everyone except me and Maria steps back in unison and surrounds the dance stage, observing us.

Lily, Dorothy, and even Sara Lin should be around here watching.

Thinking that, a wave of hesitation and panic batters me. My step stiffens and stumbles. Forget about Waltz and whatever, the only thing related to dancing I did was in middle school was a special PE program in school. There’s no way a first-time beginner like me could dance, however Maria tries to lead.

“Don’t worry, Onii-sama.”

But Maria doesn’t reprimand me.

She just smiles, as if she’s an omniscient goddess.

Maria takes a step back, and I take a step forward. Maria raises my hand over her

hand fluently and does a half-spin.

There's a certain clumsiness in my dance like a marionette being controlled, but there's also a sense of fluidity that you wouldn't see in a first-time dancer.

"This is fine as it is."

Maria speaks.

"Onii-sama just needs to leave everything to me, and follow me as it is."

"L, leave everything, haha."

An awkward laugh followed by an on-beat side-step.

"Yes, like..."

Maria steps in closer, drawing her lips to my ears, and sweetly whispers:

"Like a **doll**, obeying to my every will and whim."

I can sense a subtle hint of twist in the say she speaks.

And,

Just then...

"Everybody get down!"

\*BANG—!\*

Was a single gunshot that ripped through the night sky.



Because of the sudden gunshot, the evening party was suddenly overwhelmed in a cold silence, like in a graveyard.

Ahh, I don't know who it is, but what a relief. Here I was, stuck in the most awkward situation and everything just worked out my way because of him. He

wants me to get down and bow? Anything my savior wants me to do, and it's not like getting down is something hard to do.

Ah, hang on a second.

What did that guy mean when he said “Get down”?

“Who are you guys?!”

That shouldn't be too hard to figure out. These guys are armed terrorists who snuck into this party to threaten everyone; albeit terrorists wearing a security guard outfit. Strangely, they're rather into terrorizing everyone than protect everyone like the security guard they are.

Who's supposed to protect us if the security guards are like this?

“I said who do you think you are?!

“Shut it!”

And the brave gentleman who dared to speak up goes down with a rifle butt to the stomach.

“Stop chattering and get down right now!”

So badass, you really are. Don't worry, I'm already down on my head and knees without you telling me again.

Can't say this is one of my good nights I'm having.

And we're in the middle of nowhere, floating by somewhere in the Mediterranean.

Even if someone wises up and calls the police, that'll take up too much time and these goons will be gone by then. Isn't this why we hired security officers, so these kinds of things don't happen in the first place?

And these terrorists are moving like they're a group of government trained soldiers.

There's no way regular run-of-the-mill goons can be this organized. Maybe a bit more, and this is going to turn into something a lot bigger.

“Nice of everyone to gather all in one place, it saves us the trouble.”

Someone who appears to be the leader speaks, while tasting the food up on the table.

“Time for an introduction. We are a group of armed revolutionists, called the ‘Blades of the Left’. Maybe some of the higher-ups here have heard about us?”

Just which idiot decided to hire these guys as the security officers...

Something’s got to be done; whoever that was in charge of the security needs to write a letter of resignation right now!

Nowadays, you don’t have to be some fancy politician to know who ‘Blades of the Left’ are. They’re a group of terrorists composed of ex-soldiers with a faith in extreme terrorism for the world. From shooting down airplanes to using hostages to take down unfavorable companies, they’re simply the most extreme extremists you could ever hope to find.

Be that as it may, I never expected to actually see them in such peaceful times.

“It seemed too easy. I even thought this was a bait case by the ICPO to arrest us at the beginning.”

With his guards by his side, the leader slowly approached this way, step by step.

“But I guess he was right. We’ve really got ourselves here a big fish here.”

Like in a funeral march, the leader walks here and there around the party hall.

When he says “big fish” I can only think of one person.

I can only hope that this bad premonition I have is woefully wrong.

“Oh my, how rude, to compare me to something as low as a fish.”

Do you really have time to worry about your pride in a situation like this?!

“Ho-o.”

It seems the leader found her reaction quite entertaining. Maria waves her hair

back in a provocative way, and gazes at the leader head-on.

Just how brave are you going to act?!

“This bitch...!”

“I really don’t think your organization is capable enough to set up a fake security company, nor do I think you are influential enough to disguise yourself as one.”

In contrast to the leader’s grimace, Maria is still maintaining her poker face.

All of a sudden, the fight’s been turned into a debate.

“There is only one answer, someone more powerful is behind the curtains here.”

Maybe she’s right on point? The leader frowns slightly, and starts laughing in a cheery tone.

“As expected from the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 . You’ve got some sharp eyes there. But what can you do now?”

“I am saying know your place, as a mere pawn on a chessboard.”

“You bitch! Do you want to fucking die?!”

With Maria’s provocations, the leader looks like he’s about to rampage around insane. He pulls out a pistol from his waist and aims it right in front of Maria.

Wait,

This doesn’t look good at all!

“Um, excuse me...”

I don’t know where I got this insane courage to speak out loud. Courage is too good of a word for me but whatever.

“*Please no violence, violence is bad... OK? Please be a reason guys...*”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He’s trying to speak English. Just not very well.

The English that I spent twelve gruesome years learning, now it finally has a chance to shine right here.

Practical English! Fluent English that just rolls off the tongue when talking in front of a foreigner!

Ahh, and there I was, marveling at what an excellent education system Korea had.

“What the fuck are you on about, you retard!”

\*BWAK!\*

One of the armed guards approaches me and nails my stomachs me with his rifle stock. No lie here, it feels like my body is crumbling away with pain.

“Kuuu... hurr...!”

Covering my stomach with my arms, I crumple to the floor headfirst.

“O, Onii-sama!”

I shouldn't have acted out.

With the words “Onii-sama”, the whole atmosphere around the party hall changes drastically.

The terrorists' attention that was directed at the hostages turned to me.

—.

*What.*

You're looking down on me because I'm made of kimchee?

“You...”

And in the middle, Maria coldly glares at the leader, with venomous aura. His gun is still directed at Maria's forehead.

“I'll give you a warning.”

Despite her situation, Maria shows no sign of being intimidated. As expected from the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 . Still, acting prideful in a situation like this is only going to look like a façade.

“A warning? You’re talking nonsense, missy.”

“Unless you run away right now with your tails between your legs, only death awaits you”

I have to wonder about where she’s getting all that courage from.

Forget about death and whatever, that’s a gun pointed right at her head.

But contrary to my desperate mind, my body just won’t budge an inch, perhaps because of the shock from earlier.

Looking at it from a neutral perspective, it’s the terrorists that are in full control.

No matter how forceful Maria acts, it won’t change anything in the end.

“Listen up, missy. You can act high and mighty all you want, but you’re wrong if you’re thinking we’re gonna leave here nicely.”

Nonetheless, the leader seems to have realized that as well, as a sense of superiority returned to him. He continues his talk.

“Our demands are simple. First, as of now...”

“Whatever your demands may be, I have no intention of even remotely considering them.”

Really, no matter how positive you try to look at this, she’s just digging her own grave straight down to hell here.

“I am not that free to have the time of day to listen to children crying, unaware of the situation they’re in.”

“You fucking bitch! You really want to fucking die, don’t you?!”

The leader looks infuriated with veins popping out on the side of his head. I really

hope Maria knows that he could pull the trigger at any moment when his anger gets the better of him. Why doesn't she realize that?

"Right now, you have only two choices to decide from. First, surrender peacefully and subsequently be punished by the law. Second, disregard my advice and die a pointless death."

I really can't understand how Maria's brain works.

"It's like I'm talking to a wall here."

The leader gives up on the "common sense" persuasion he tried to have with her.

"Fine then. Holding someone like the Blackhazel as a hostage wasn't a very smart thing to begin with, anyway."

He shakes his shoulder, in an exasperated way.

"But today, I condemn this same Blackhazel to death. Even with just this act, it'll make this whole business something to be remembered."

The pistol was once again directed at Maria's forehead.

And with no hesitation, the trigger was...

/004.

"Maria!"

The 7.62mm Tokarev pistol round pierces straight into the skull and lodges itself in the cerebral cortex. The cerebrospinal fluid and viscous blood oozes out from the freshly-made bullet hole.

Like a marionette with its strings cut, the leader of the armed terrorists loses his balance and falls to the floor, dead.

"W-what the—?!"

Before other people can even realize what is happening, the silhouette cuts through the crowd at supersonic speed.

Having closed the gap between the three guards, **Lily** reaches out her hand to one of their necks.

As her arms reach out, the hideaway knife sheathed beneath the sleeve of her black trench coat slides out.

Lily stabs the knife between his two anterior jugular veins: one of many vital points of the human body, and draws a line down to the carotid, inflicting a fatal wound.

At the same time, she swings the violin case on her opposite shoulder, and with it bashes the other guard in the face.

His jaws break apart and his facial structure becomes deformed beyond recognition— primitive violence at its finest.

The violin case undergoes a geometric transformation from the impact at the same time and ejects a semi-automatic pistol from it, like a dispenser.

It's same as the one she used to kill the leader, a Soviet semi-automatic pistol Tokarev TT-33.

Without even looking, she stretches out her hands and starts sharpshooting the guards beside the hostages.

Direct hit with no room for any error. Straight to the vital points.

In sequence with her last action, Lily hides behind the violin case she had pulled back to dodge the bullets fired by the armed guards who had just realized what was going on.

Because of Lily's uniquely petite figure, hitting her hidden behind the cover was by no means an easy task.

And it was their mistake to have assumed that it was an ordinary violin case solely based on its exterior.

Stopping every bullet that was fired point-blank with their M16 assault rifles at close range, the hardness of the violin case's surface is beyond imagination. It's evident that it had been made bullet-proof with a special kind of alloy.

Now, the armed terrorists that was around 10 men has been cut down by half.

“G-Gahhh!”

In a state of panic, the armed guard fires indiscriminately without any discretion..

To be more exact, that's what he tried to do.

But Lily's throwing knife dives into his wrist tendon. He drops the assault rifle, grabs his wrist with the other hand and, before he can even scream, another throwing knife comes flying his way.

After that, Lily kicks off the floor and charges across to the closest guard.

She dislocates his arm 180 degrees, and then moves to his back and drives the newly unsheathed tactical knife into his cervical spine. The grisly knife, with its serrated edge to maximize killing power, pierces straight through and cuts the spinal nerves apart.

However, just when the knife seemed to be stationary, it was no longer in the guard's cervical spine or Lily's hand— at blazing speed, it was flying towards the heart of another armed guard.

—Along with a scream the situation comes to an end.

Now there are only three of them left, disarmed and taken out of action.

The tables have turned.



Having been tied up by Lily, the remaining gunmen were kneeling side by side in front of Maria.

“Onii-sama!”

But Maria doesn't even give them the slightest glance and instead comes running to me, who's laying on the floor.

“Is your injury okay?! Are you hurt anywhere?! Ahh, I was so afraid for Onii-sama's safety that my heart was on the verge of breaking...!”

“Ah,ahaha. I'm fine, it's nothing to worry about.”

To be honest, it's a bit misleading to say that I'm fine since my stomach is still throbbing with pain. Even so, I really can't let Maria get worried more than she is now. Her eyes are brimming with tears and she seems to be genuinely concerned about me.

"Thank goodness! Aah, really, thank goodness...!"

Maria says to herself quietly while caressing my cheek with her soft hand.

"Uh, yeah..."

At any rate, did Maria forget that we're in front of other people? Well, then again, there wouldn't have been much difference even if she knew.

Eventually, Maria regains her composure and calms down.

Wiping away her glistening tears and reassuming her poker face, Maria slowly turns her head to the gunmen.

Looking at them without any emotion as though they're mere objects, her eyes are as cold and still as the artic night. Yet, there is a clear animosity in those twin eyes, to such a degree that even the crowd can feel a shiver down their backs.

It's my first time seeing Maria like this.

Even the time where she had laced into the teacher when she first came to greet me wasn't as frightening as this.

Overflowing with an aura of authority like that of a grim reaper residing over life and death, she's terrifyingly calm amidst this brutal bloodbath.

Her heterochromatic eyes of blue and gold seems to emit a brilliance of cold enmity.

"Like I said before, there is someone more powerful behind the curtains here."

"F, fuck you! You goddamn filthy Blackhazel whore!"

One of the guards that was kneeling in the middle spits on her derisively.

"Oh my, it seems that you are in need of a lesson in proper etiquette."

Maria smiles sweetly, taking out her handkerchief and wiping off the saliva on her evening dress. Then she lightly snaps her fingers, as a certain sign to Lily.

\*BANG!\*

In synchronization with Maria's motion, Lily fires a round into the guard's knee.

"GYAAAH!"

"You are gravely mistaken if you think that I'm going to hand you over quietly to the police."

"W-What?!"

"This cruise ship was never seajacked. You were never here from the beginning; therefore, the police will not come."

...Because they have no reason to.

The moment the guards realize the meaning behind her words, all their faces become disconcerted with fear.

Maria is smiling gently like an angel.

But it's just her mouth.

In contrast, her eyes were cold and dead to the world in their silence. That peculiar dissociation evokes a sense of overwhelming disparity that one cannot endure.

"N-No! Please, spare me! I really don't know anything!"

One of the guards pathetically bows down and starts to beg, out of desperation.

"Don't worry. Honestly speaking, I never had any kind of expectations for small-fries like you."

"Then why...?!"

The thoughts reflected on the guards' expressions are easily understandable.

Maria takes a light breath and continues her words.

“I’m merely being faithful by taking the responsibility for the words that I have spoken.”

“W-What are you talking about?”

“I have clearly given you the opportunity to decide.”

The opportunity to decide?

As soon as they question themselves, a single scene flashes by in their mind.

「Right now, you have only two choices to decide from.」

That was the suggestion that everyone here laughed and brushed aside as a simple bluff.

“The one you should be resenting is none other than your leader. As I have told you many times, my actions are completely a matter of being faithful to my responsibility. I have no personal feelings.

There’s no personal feelings here. Maria snaps her fingers again, saying those words indifferently.

The gunfire tears through the hollow silence.

One shot, two shots.

And,

“Hold it, Lily.”

Suddenly, Maria extends her hand in front of Lily’s way, stopping her.

Thinking it’s strange that he’s not yet dead, the trembling guard slightly opens his eyes, which were shut tight.

“Oh my, what a curious coincidence.”

“W, What...?”

For a while, Maria stares at him intently, not saying a word.

Eventually, the momentary silence comes to an end by her voice.

“You have inflicted violence upon my Onii-sama, *have you not?*”

“!”

That’s right. Now that I look carefully, he’s the guard who nailed my stomach with his rifle stock.

“Then it’s a different story for you.”

“D-Different?”

“Although I’ve said my actions were a matter of being faithful to my responsibility, it’s a different story if that person is the one who dared to blemish my Onii-sama’s precious body.”

Maria makes a gesture towards Lily, like she’s issuing some kind of a command.

As she does, Lily positions herself behind the guard’s back and opens the violin case. The object she takes out from the inside is none other than a needle... that is about 15 centimetres long, glistening.

“Wh, what are you...?”

“It’s your atonement.”

Realizing the gravity of the situation too late, the guard rocks his body in fear, but it’s a meaningless struggle.

Lily forcibly opens the guard’s hand tied behind his back, then without any sign of hesitation shoves in the needle right below his fingernail, all the way to the end.

“GYAAAAAAH!”

An ear-splitting scream echoed out in pain.

“My my, you are such a crybaby. **I have only put the first one in, you know?**”

"W-W-Wait! I-I'm sorry...! Please f-forgive me... Please! I b-beg of you...! Please!"

Pale from the intense pain, the guard barely manages to speak with his shivering lips. But his plea is met with silence as Maria continues to watch him with a twisted smile on her face.

It's as if she's enjoying the sight of his agony.

My blood ran cold.

This is torture— one that is inhumane and excruciating beyond one's imagination.

A series of shivers raises the hairs on my skin and slithers down my spine like a nest of thousand snakes, then slowly twines around my whole body.

"Why did you stop, Lily? Continue with what you were doing."

"W-W-Wait... N-n-no... Please, p-please! Please, please, please, please... GYAAAAAH!"

Foaming at the mouth, the guard writhes in agony and almost blacks out.

The pain must be unbearable, having the 15cm long needle pierce straight underneath his fingernail and reach all the way down to his wrist. Judging from the amount of blood he's letting out, it must've went through one of the arteries.

The guard convulses like a madman and incontinently wets himself.

"Fufu, how dirty. Well then... Where were we? Ah, yes. **We were on our third one now**, right, Lily?"

\*Stab!\*

"GYAAAAAAAH!"

"S, stop it!"

Unable to endure her act of cruelty any longer, I shout out with all I got to break free from the paralysis.

"This is more than enough, Maria! Stop this madness right now!"

“I do not want to, Onii-sama.”

“?!”

But what I get is an unexpected answer that I’ve never thought of.

Those words that I had so foolishly believed that Maria would never say to me.

“W-What did you just say...?”

“I said I do not want to, Onii-sama.”

The words of refusal.

“I am— the Guillotine that punishes those who bring harm to Onii-sama.”

This girl, just what is she trying to say?

“This human trash crossed the line and inflicted a **blemish** on my precious Onii-sama’s body...! There is no way this small amount of pain can count as atonement for his crime. Even if he has Onii-sama’s forgiveness, I shall never forgive him. Yes, without a question.”

A side of Maria that I simply can’t fathom.

“More, more... He has to scream more in desperation and agony beneath by feet!

It’s pure insanity.

“Now, Lily? Do not pay any attention to Onii-sama and carry on with what you were doing.”

“No, stop! Drop that needle right now and stop!”

“—As your master, I order you: Do not stop no matter what.”

And with those words, Lily carried out Maria’s orders until the tenth needle.

Ten times.

Ten needles. Ten trips to the circles of hell.

The man was now in an indescribable state; unable to talk, unable to stand. He was collapsed on the floor, he was convulsing like an epileptic.

The needles were poking out of the holes from his wrist, having punctured all the way.

He was spraying out blood like a fountain, losing his body temperature and slowly dying a painful death.

“J-Just kill me...”

Having lost his grip on the last straw of hope, the guard waits for a coup de grâce.

It's something that only a person who has been pushed to the utmost limit would wish for.

The earnest desire for death.

“No, that will not do.”

However, even his final wish for a swift, peaceful death is denied by the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 .

“You'll be buried at sea with your arms and legs broken.”

“W, w-what...?”

“Feel the despair seep into your bones as you drown to your death in solitude.”

‘That's the only penance that you're able to do.’

The goddess of death announces her final verdict and strikes the gavel three times, sending out distant echoes.

Maria turns around slowly and looks this way.

Our eyes meet.

A bloodcurdling shiver races down my spine.

My top was drenched in profuse amounts of cold sweat.

This girl— who is she?

This girl— is she really the Maria that I know?

「A genocidal war criminal in angel's clothing. Persephone on earth.」

「The second coming of 21st century Clausewitz. The greatest military tactics expert of the century.」

“Onii-sama?”

Tilting her head as though she's worried, Maria moves a step closer to me.

I barely stop myself from taking a step back instinctively.

Just who are you?

My younger half sister Maria? The one with the silly jokes, who's somehow just a little bit off with her sense of reality?

No,

That's not it.

Her sense of reality isn't just a little bit off.

In every sense of the word, it's otherworldly.

Then just who is that girl?

The 『Princess of Pure Darkness』 and Maria... Are they really the same person?

Giving out command to kill people like it's nothing of importance, and turning your back on them like nothing ever happened. Just who the hell is that 『Princess of Pure Darkness』 ?

And it's not just Maria.

I haven't forgotten about her. Despite being only twelve years old, she carries out brutal acts in cold blood that normal people can't even begin to imagine— Lily.

Shooting someone at point-blank range, smashing someone's head open, and thrusting a knife into someone without the slightest of hesitation.

Nonchalantly torturing a person who's pleading for his life.

It's not about her sense of reality being a little bit off.

War movies, spy movies, gore movies; I've seen them countless times.

But this is different.

It's like it's from a different world.

"I shall formally introduce her to you once more, Onii-sama."

In the midst of countless people watching her in awe, the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 slowly opens her mouth.

"This very child is the strongest agent that we Bandersnatch take pride in."

Looking this way indifferently from Maria's side, the eyes that Lily had were terrifying. Devoid of emotion, it was a pool of empty darkness that spiralled down endlessly.

She's not acting here.

It's not a practical joke she's pulling here to intimidate me.

"With the code name 《Feo Pafisto》, she is the fourth highest ranking officer of Ladies in Black — a multipurpose special forces under the direct control of the head of Blackhazel. I present to you..."

That's right.

"—Major Lily Shupiel."

Those girls, so to speak, are residents of another world.

### III. Maria :: Please look at me

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/001.

“This is wrong.”

I'm now inside a military transportation helicopter, inscribed with an ashen wolf insignia, heading back to the Blackhazel Manor.

Lily is sitting beside me, and to her opposite side are Maria and Dorothy, gazing absentmindedly outside the window.

Below us is the dark night sea, flowing as if to swallow everything inside its dark abyss, like the legendary Leviathan.

As the awkward silence continues on, Maria finally opens her mouth.

“What could you be referring to?”

She's not asking a question.

Or rather, she understands what I'm referring to. She's referring as to why she can't understand me.

“Back there... That wasn't normal at all...”

“There is nothing to feel strange about. Surely you don't feel pity toward them, Onii-sama?”

“Pity, you say.”

I'm talking about pity here.

Be it Geneva Convention or whatnot, the fact that a human being died so miserably under pain and torture right in front of me. The weight that fact takes. The guilt. It has nothing to do with the fact that the said human being was part of an extremist group of terrorists. Just like a Möbius strip.

No, that fact that confuses me the most isn't this.

“Alright, let's say everything you've been saying is correct and all.”

Even so, I can't accept this.

"Do you... really feel nothing with what just happened?"

"What do you mean by 'feel nothing'?"

So she's not even aware of the problem here. That much? You're basically saying something like this is just an everyday life for you?

I just can't understand.

Anyone could see how twisted this is; it's a given.

"How can you even act so calm?"

"Because that was the best choice to take at the time."

Best choice?

Torturing people with cruelty beyond imagination, when they were lying around helpless with no will to resist, breaking their limbs, and throwing a man begging for his life into the sea, was that really the best choice to make at the time?

"What happened back then had nothing to do with choices. It was just... indiscriminate sadism!"

Yes, from what I can tell, it was nothing more than insanity-driven violence.

Not more, not less.

"That's you, and Lily was..."

"Lily is our agent working under Bandersnatch's finest special force we take pride in. I think Onii-sama has forgotten, but Lily is a soldier, through-and-through."

As if trying to say that is enough, Maria cuts across my sentence and retorts in a matter-of-factly tone.

Matter-of-factly.

An agent with her name registered under the multinational PMC Bandersnatch's

military computer database. In other words, she's a soldier. There's nothing wrong with her killing and torturing. It's how she was trained.

Yes.

That attitude right there is the core of the problem right there.

"There's nothing wrong because she's a soldier. Is that what you're saying?"

"That's correct."

I'm getting really frustrated. At the twisted logic of the Blackhazel, at this giant snowball of irony standing before me.

"Lily's just a child that should still be in elementary school! And you, you think there's nothing wrong with that because she's a soldier?! Giving knives and guns to a child, training her to kill people – can you honestly say there's nothing wrong with that?"

"Exactly so. I am glad you are seeing my point correctly."

Exactly what does it mean to be a Blackhazel?

I knew nothing.

This world, this logic.

I've never heard of it, and I don't want to.

"I've become... afraid of you."

"!"

Why did I say that.

No, why I did I'm painfully aware of.

Maybe I knew by memories; the only thing I could do to Maria was not by using logic and reasoning against her, but against her heart.

《I could care less about the world.》

“What, do you mean...?”

《The dead that condemns me in my dreams every night, the sea of blood from the bullet-riddled bodies we have killed, the weight of their grudge, and the fingers pointing the blame for the misery of the world; I do not care in the slightest.》

“I’m saying I’m afraid of you.”

《What I’m really afraid of is not my ugliness or the world’s blame, but...》

“That...!”

《...the rejection that will come from Onii-sama because of those things.》

As I expected, it hit straight to her heart.

Maria seems quite shocked by what I’ve said; she hangs her head, biting her lips.

“Why...?”

“Don’t you know why?”

“Those people, they inflicted injury upon my precious Onii-sama...! I only made sure they paid the price! Why, Onii-sama?! Why won’t you recognize the feelings I hold for you?!”

“Feelings, you say.”

what kind of nonsense are you sprouting now.

“Don’t make me laugh. There’s no feelings here. Only your twisted sense of standard you view the world, filled with arrogance and ir...!”

Just when I was about to lose it and raise my voice.

Just then.

Dorothy, who was sitting there, silent and voiceless, stands up and slaps my cheeks with everything she has.

Not knowing why, I look up on Dorothy staring down on me.

“Dorothy...?”

Even for Maria, it must have been something she didn't expect.

“Hmph! What an idiot. You don't even know anything about the reality, but look at you hurting people hiding behind your so-called “kindness”. It's like you're the only person right in this world, adding morals, being noble, and whatnot just to make yourself look like a fancy saint!”

“What...?”

“Just wake up, you stupid idiot!”

“Dorothy, your words against our Onii-sama are out of line!”

Despite Maria's words Dorothy continues on.

“Murder? Torture? So what! The reason you plebeians stay plebeians is always the same. All you do is complain and grumble, you never do anything to change it. Not like you have the ability to anyway!”

“Avoiding responsibilities now?! Wasn't it your fault that all this mess was created to begin with?”

Your.

To be accurate, you and me.

It's something that even the bonds of siblings can't narrow any closer.

“What?! You stupid idiot, are...”

“...Stop.”

Just as when we were about to start shouting and let this escalate further...

Tired of our rambling, Lily speaks in a quiet but audible voice with her message.

“Fighting is, bad... So...”

“!”

"Geez, why did I even start this..."

With that, Dorothy breathes out a sigh, and turns her sight towards the window. Time has passed, and the silhouette of the sun disappearing into the Carpathian Mountains shadows in.

I'm unable to say a word, and all I can do is stare at Lily without focus.

Like a powerless doll.



"How did things turn out this way..."

I lie on my bed staring at the ceiling, talking to no one in particular.

The hour hand on the clock is about to point somewhere around four.

Enveloping the Blackhazel Manor is a cold silence, something that could summon ghosts.

That being this way, the owner of the house Maria was out of the house to investigate the recent hijacking. Dorothy is shut in inside her room. And Lily was hard to find, because of her frequent nature to appear and disappear out of nowhere.

Everything is tangled up like a yarn; it feels very awkward around here. We didn't resolve anything in the end, and it was my fault that things escalated this further.

Certainly, Maria has a point.

If you think about it, it was Maria's quick thinking that saved us all, and Lily who was quick enough to act it out. No matter how it was done, I can't deny that she saved us all.

With my life being on the line, the matter of revenge and how cruel it was is something I shouldn't fuss about. She did save me, so I can't say that it was smart for me to get angry and raise my voice against the person that saved my life.

"Goddamn it."

Straightening my messy hair, I get out from the bed.

I'll go drink a glass of cold water or something, was what I was thinking as I turned the doorknob and stepped outside. I walk outside and step forward a bit to reach the hallway.

Just then.

As soon as I approach the hallway, I hear someone.

I stop my feet and turn my head towards the source of the sound.

"Lily?"

It's Lily.

What could she be doing this late.

I crouch to Lily's height, and Lily slowly turns her towards my direction. Like a wet mice, she struggles to raise her head to stare at me.

Judging by her sleepy face, it seems that Lily was sleeping here in the hallway.

Wait, what.

Now that I think about it, I never saw Lily around when I was sleeping.

I always assumed that she was sleeping in some other room, I really hope she hasn't been sleeping out here out in this hallway.

"You, all this time, have you...?"

It's been about a week since Lily has been on my bodyguard duty. I wasn't the type to wake easily from my sleep, so it explains why I didn't know about this.

But even so, leaving her like this.

"...Un-huh."

My bad.

"Geez, you'll catch a cold if you sleep in a place like this. Come inside, I'll sleep on the floor."

I softly pull on Lily's arm, who was using her coat as a blanket.

"Uu, hauu...!"

And all of a sudden, a groan. Upon further examination, I find out that Lily's right arm is swollen red rather unpleasantly.

"You, your arm?!"

I carefully wrap up her sleeves to reveal her arm.

Not good.

Starting from her shoulder joint, and ending at her elbow, it looks like her arm is in serious condition.

But how did she get this injury? From what I can remember, Lily didn't get so much as a scratch from the fight before.

"Couldn't be."

Then I realize.

That Lily is only a twelve-year-old girl.

Yes. No matter what people say, Lily's body is just that of a twelve-year old. With a body like that, it wouldn't be strange that moving at supersonic speed and swinging a violin case at inhuman velocity would have complications on her body, regardless of what training she went through.

"it's fine. This much... better later."

"Geez, you idiot, does this look okay to you?"

Her dislocation seems to have been taken care of somehow. But the swelling hasn't gone away, and it's not like human bones are lego pieces you can just rearrange to your liking.

Goddamn it, even I know that much.

“Just a sec, sit down right here.”

I forcefully sit Lily down and step outside of my room, then walk down the spiral metal stairway. Below is the lobby connected and the guest room with white tiger pelts as a carpet.

The inside is shaped in a question mark. The rooms are divided with the barriers up and below, branching like twigs.

Without any hesitation, I walk inside the room with the sign “toilet”, grab whichever towel was hanged near me, and wet it with cold water. And the next destination is the kitchen. I take the ice inside the fridge and crunch it up into smaller pieces, and wrap it around with the wet towel.

Instant cold pack, in a sense.

I re-enter my room, and Lily is sitting on the bed, her body slightly slanted. She’s blinking and staring my way.

“That, what...?”

Lily tilts her head in a quizzical manner, her body returning straight.

“Um, an emergency treatment to get rid of swelling, let’s say.”

I gently place the ice pack on Lily’s sleeveless arm.

“Hauu...!”

As I thought, the pain must be pretty severe. To relieve her tensions, I massage the left side of her body, pressing softly on her muscles.

“When I was young,”

Glancing at Lily receiving my massage, purring like a kitten, I continue my story.

“My family went bankrupt, and my saint-of-a stepfather did nothing but go outside and get drunk.”

Wondering about what I'm about to say, Lily tilts her head.

"And what this maniac liked to do was beat me up with a beer bottle when I got home from school. That was... when I was in my 4th grade in elementary school?"

"...."

"Ahaha, there's no need to have a serious expression like that."

I wonder if I told her something I shouldn't have, and I scratch my head in awkwardness.

"Anyway, what I wanted to say was that I'm pretty good at stuff like this. You can trust me."

"You, maso...?"

"Did you really have to crack a joke at serious times like this."

I ruffle Lily's hair and chuckle slightly.

"Well for today, sleep in my bed. I'll talk to Maria tomorrow to prepare a bed for you. From what I can tell, the only thing this house has is empty rooms."

Lily nods her head and lies down on the bed just like that, obviously not disliking the suggestion.

I sit on the edge of the bed, watching Lily, and prepare to spend the rest of the night on the floor.

And then, Lily suddenly grabs and pulls on my shirt sleeve.



“Hmm?”

“Lily, want to sleep together...”

“Huh? Ahh, I see. Ahaha.”

So you really are a child.

Thinking something along that line, I smile to myself.

Doesn’t the saying go “Seven years is when someone is all grown up”?<sup>1</sup> It’s not like I particularly have a fetish for grade school girls wearing backpacks, but still.

Ah, I don’t even know.

Lily’s a twelve-year-old girl at best. It’s not like I’m committing a crime by sleeping next to her. On both of our sense of morality, I mean. Well, I don’t even know what “sense of morality” refers to but you get the point.

Lily is crawled up like a flea, glancing at me like I’m acting rather odd.

And Lily’s shape resembles something like a very needy puppy, needing care and attention. And I fall into the temptation to just hug her tightly.

Even though the reality is just the opposite.

/002.

“Are you up, Onii-sama?”

Just like everyday, Maria is there.

Like everything that happened yesterday didn’t happen, sitting on the dining table calmly enjoying her breakfast.

“A, ahh.”

Could she be feigning her tranquillity? Like usual, it’s really hard to see through Maria’s poker-face and tell what she’s up to.

<sup>1</sup> Random Korean proverb that I suck at explaining. Basically it means that someone is “of age” when they’re seven.

In the end, I grab my seat opposite of Maria and carefully grab my tableware.

“Speaking of breakfast, where is Dorothy?”

I asked, taking care not to tread on anything still sensitive from yesterday.

“Dorothy is away today on a health checkup, she went out sometime earlier this morning.”

“Oh...”

“Anything else you’d like to ask?”

“Well, no.”

Let’s eat, is what I wanted to awkwardly point out. I’m sure she’d realized.

But even so, this air of comfortableness remains the same.

It’s not like what happened yesterday is something that happened just because of a simple difference in opinion.

It’s just that I saw.

That side of Maria.

That fact will not change, and cannot change.

Fear and insanity.

The true face of 《The Princess of Pure Darkness》.

And to make it worse, it was **me** who outspokenly said stuff like I was afraid of her. At the very least, I’m aware of what Maria thinks of me, and I know what kind of meaning that has towards her.

“Hey, Maria.”

And so, I was the first one to break the uncomfortable silence and speak.

Even with a calm poker face like that, I know that inside her heart is burning away to cinders. Even if you were a stupid dense protagonist of a harem manga, you'd be able tell that.

“It’s fine, Onii-sama.”

But.

...Uh, huh?

“Please don’t mind what happened yesterday. This girl does not particularly mind.”

“Wh, what?”

Not mind, she says.

This girl here, is she really Maria?

At this unexpected response, I rub my eyes hastily and stare back at Maria.

Yep, staring.

“Huh?”

“Is something the matter?”

“No, I mean... Do you have your clothes on inside-out there?”

With the expression “what are you even talking about”, Maria glances down at her blouse. Lo and behold, her stitch marks are visible.

“A, ah!”

Maria gets up in a panic and steps backward.

“Hey, you have your shoes mixed up too...”

“Hau?!”

Shock and fear, triple-hit-combo of shame.

And with a “T-then I’ll go get changed right away...” she quickly returns to her room. Wondering whether to remind her or not, I decide to speak once more.

“Your room isn’t that way.”

To make it worse, she crashes into a wall rather than go into “her” room and collapses weakly to the floor.

Uwa, this is serious business.

She’s in a total panic mode!

“A, Are you hurt? You alright?!”

I hastily get up from my chair and try to help Maria get up, who was still collapsed on the floor.

“I’m... fi...ne...”

And with that, Maria hangs her head low and shakes her shoulder to take my hands off her body.

“This girl here needs no assistance!”

I’m sure you don’t.

I knew there was something fishy about her when she said she was “fine”.

“So please... pay no attention to me! Surely Onii-sama doesn’t, doesn’t... like the kind of girl I’ve become!”

“Hey, what’s with that kind of pessimistic thinking?!”

Speaking in a tone of someone giving up on life, I can see tears glistening on Maria’s eyes.

“Even Onii-sama said you were ‘afraid’ of me and disapproved me!”

“When did I ever say that I disapproved you?!”

“If that’s so, please explain what you said to me yesterday! I... I... Maria Lunalady

Blackhazel have lost her will to live ever since her Onii-sama disapproved of her!"

This sight of Maria sniffling, saddened and unable to continue her words, is certainly not the sight of Maria I came to know and recognize.

"You idiot, what I disapproved was your twisted ways from before! Why are you associating yourself with your methods?"

"Because, that is how this girl lives by!"

"Haah?"

"This way of living is the only thing this girl came to know! This is the only thing I could have learned! Nor father, mother, sister, nor anyone else taught me any other ways of living!"

Maria, unable to contain her emotions, exploded in a cloud of sadness.

Trespassing forward the boundary of emotions, Maria is sobbing uncontrollably, crying away. The sight of her leaves me in a state of panic, and I don't know what to do.

"Yes! In this girl's world, this is the only way of living! Where the strong terrorizes the weak, and where unless one reigns over others with power and fear, only pack of hyenas await, ready to swarm over the dead!"

...

And that, twisted and unexpected it is, was the terrifyingly persuasive reason behind Maria's motives, protecting her will and opinions.

That is to say, logic of reality.

"To live, this girl had no choice but to choose this way of living! To live, this girl had no choice but to become the 《Princess of Pure Darkness!》! That's why, that's why..."

That was the secret of insanity lurking behind Maria, something I've never expected.

The reason.

Or, put in a better word, reality.

“Please... don’t disapprove of this girl...”

Ahh.

Was it so.

What I came to know until now as the《Princess of Pure Darkness》was only a husk of what it really was.

A façade of wolf skin this weak and vulnerable girl was forced to put on; to survive in this harsh reality she was in.

The little sister Maria, and the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》Maria.

Reality becomes falsehood, and falsehood becomes reality.

I was wrong. No, I wasn’t just wrong. I was disillusioned to the point of idiocy. The fact that thought of Maria that way makes me feel disgusted and shamed beyond relief.

Silently, I take Maria’s petite body and embrace her with my arms softly.

“O-Onii-sama...?”

This is the only thing I can do.

The only respite I can offer for her.

“I’m sorry.”

Maria, right now, is shaking like an injured little bird inside my arms.

This girl, were her shoulders always this small?

Yes.

It wasn't Maria's fault.

Not hers, nor Lily's. They're all the same.

Even those girls, and even the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》are only minuscule pieces of gear in this giant, cruel machine we call reality, stuck in between the gears as they're crushed and sacrificed for the greater good.

### /003.

Putting my textbook titled [Noam Chomsky's Practical Use of Analytic Philosophy into Human Science] into my backpack, I let out a worried sigh.

"White is the paper, black are the letters."<sup>1</sup>

And even if someone heard my sigh, it's not like they'll do something about it either.

I'm currently at the linguistic centre of the Illuminati Private Academy, with the lecture just finished. What I understand is close to zero, and what I don't is close to everything.

Stretching my arms slowly, I get up from my seat, half-hearted.

With Lily silently behind my back, I slowly open the back door in the classroom and move to the hallway. The hall was already crammed full with students who were also done with their class.

"Ugh, why the hell are there so many people here?"

Muttering out my complaint, I part through the crowd of students toward the second floor hall; the reason being my next class was located there. What was the subject? ...Math, I think. Basic communication I could manage somehow, but classes like this, littered with technical mumbo-jumbo, I still had problems with.

"That's that, but I haven't saw Miss Sara around today."

Now that I think about it, it was only two days ago that the cruise hijacking took place. Because of the whole business with Lily, I didn't get to sleep until four in the

<sup>1</sup> Korean proverb roughly said when one does not understand what's written.

morning. I feel a little strange myself, attending school normally just a day after the hijacking.

Well, compared to Maria, who spent the night awake and had to depart to work just after her breakfast, this is probably nothing. Even if she was only acting all right on the outside...

Speaking of Maria, why am I talking about these things, of all times?

Tapping my temple hurting from the lack of sleep, I try to find the lecture room. It's not that the room was hard to find, but this bustling crowd here just makes it worse. It's not like I'm used to this school yet either.

*\*Pull pull\**

I was immersed in useless thoughts when I felt Lily tugging at my clothes from the back.

I turn my head around to find Lily, acting restless and fidgety.

“Lily, bathroom...”

“Hah!?”

So even this robot of a girl has to go to bathroom. As soon as my word of approval comes out, she dashes away to somewhere.

And just when I was about to resume my journey to find my classroom, something bumps into me.

“What?”

I must've bumped into someone.

“Ah, sorry.”

Regaining my composure, I look toward the source only to find a small group of students bunched up. You could tell with just a glance that these people weren't the type you'd like to get involved with.

Some bad apples from a rich family, perhaps?

“Where do you have your eyes attached to, bumping into everything?”

Picking fights right off the bat. I don’t think they’re interested in talking nicely.

“On my head, where else do you think they’d be attached to?”

“You little shit, who do you think you are?”

“Tch, I said I’m sorry, how much more you want me to do for bumping into someone?”

“Haa, look at this little yellow monkey here, thinking he’s the boss.”

Seeing that I’m not as submissive as they expected, the group surrounds me in a threatening tone.

The situation takes a turn for the worse, and already there is a crowd of people around us, forming a sort of coliseum around us.

As always, street fights always begin with something trivial.

I can’t say this situation is going my way.

Although I’d like to ask just when my life has ever went my way, but still.

That’s that, but yellow monkey?

I like that. It’s true when you think about it.

I can stand for anything else, but I can’t stand people calling me yellow monkey and getting away with it!

“Sounds to me like you guys aren’t gonna let this go without a fight.”

Even so, I scratch my head and reply back calmly to the gang.

“But just to make sure, why not just let this go?”

“What, you chicken out or something?”

“Well, not particularly but...”

You look a bit too old to be using that old insult to taunt me in, not that it'll matter when Lily gets here. What's she taking so long anyway? I don't mind if you have to sprint your way here, just come quickly.

"What're you mumbling about, you bitch!"

And so, one of the goon that I bumped into lets his emotions get the better of him and throws a punch my way.

Bad timing.

Even so, I can't be hiding Lily's back forever.

Taking a hit, I wind back up and prepare for a counte...

"You people over there, what are you doing?"

And then.

A familiar voice resonates to me, and I stop where I am.

I turn my eyes, only to find Dorothy cutting through the crowd into the centre.

"D-Dorothy Iblis Blackhazel!?"

Unbelievably, everyone, including the one that threw a punch my way, backs up in an instant and stiffens up.

"Hmm~ I thought something was up when you smelly jocks were gathered up here, so it was for this?"

And In comparison, Dorothy is overwhelming and arrogant, like a princess, as though she was above them in ranking from the start.

It's like looking a medieval relation between a noble and a plebeian.

"What could Blackhazel possibly want w, with us...!"

"I wonder~?"

Shaking her shoulder and commanding the flow, Dorothy's form right now feels

somewhat close to Maria's stature. I guess sisters are sisters. Sisters as in identical twins, not just any sisters.

"W-We were just teaching a lesson to this lowbred yellow monkey over here! If we were in the way for something then-"

"No, I'd rather you stay right there for now."

Dorothy retorts back in an icy tone.

It seems that the fours goons here aren't aware as to why she's so antagonistic toward them.

"If you want to fight a dog, then shouldn't you make sure you're strong enough to take on its master as well?"

And I see where this is going. But to call me a dog in front of everyone here, this brat's attitude has no limits.

There's nothing more exciting than watching a fight, save for watching a fire burn, and with Dorothy joining the fray, I'd say this is worth watching with popcorn and pop by your side.

"W, we don't know why you're so..."

"That pathetic little carp there."

Do you mean me, by any chance?

Judging by how Dorothy is shaking her shoulder and pointing my way, I'd say it's pretty clear that she means me.

"Disappointing as he is, even as a virgin quick-shot lolicon, he's still my brother in any case."

"W-What?"

"Holy shit!"

Faces distort in surprise. In a sense.

So to explain everyone's expression right now with an analogy, these Russian goons found out that their student A that they oh-so-loved to use as a delivery boy was the son of a Mafia boss. Maybe more than that.

"I'd rather not acknowledge it myself, but if he ever got back home with his face all beaten up, Maria-onee-sama could just might decide to kill you all."

And why does the word "kill you all" doesn't sound exaggerated at all? If anything else, Maria would definitely do that, if not more.

"B, but! He's not a pure-blood!"

"Hmm~ So you'd think it'd be okay to look down on someone that's only half a Blackhazel?"

I can understand what this guy's obsessing about. For the Blackhazel family that's possesses so much over the purity of the blood, it'd seem weird for one of them to be of mixed blood.

"S, Sorry! We really didn't do anyt..."

"He's the one that punched you! I had nothing to do with th-"

Oh, look at you guys now.

You were the first to start this fight, and you're also the first to beg and grovel. By the way, why are you apologizing to Dorothy and not me?

"To be honest, I couldn't care less what you guys did to my stupid brother."

Dorothy speaks eloquently, carefully surveying their faces.

"The important thing is, whether he's stupid or half-blooded or not, he's still a Blackhazel."

The conversation's taking a weird turn now. I have no choice but to just sit by and listen, not really able to find a place to squeeze into the conversation.

"To be short, you guys mocked the 'Blackhazel' inside my stupid brother over there."

“!”

“W, we’ll do anything you’ll ask! We’re sorry!”

“Oh, you’ll do anything? Really~?”

Dorothy is glaring sharply at the gang like a cat, with her hands crossed. No matter how you look at it, she’s not about to let them off the hook.

“Then in that case, how about you kneel and beg for mercy here?”

“That’s...!”

A wave of hesitation sparks through the gang. Begging and kneeling in such a public place like this, it’s much too severe to even consider it a simple “humiliation.” They did recklessly decide to punch me, but I really don’t think this is the right way to go.

“Hey, Dorothy-“

“Just sit there and shut up for a second, you stupid idiot.”

“No, but isn’t this this a bit...”

Too much?

It’s just attracting more and more attention.

“Listen up. If you were shamed even once, you return it back hundredfold. That is our rule.”

‘It would be best to be both loved and feared. But since the two rarely come together, anyone compelled to choose will find greater security in being feared than in being loved’: Words of Machiavelli himself.

I scan Dorothy and the gang in turn, unable to decide what to do.

“For example, brutally sentencing them to a humiliation so cruel, to the point they’re socially outcast from everyone else?”

“What!?”

"J-Just a sec! I really didn't know anything about him!"

"Or, we could just settle this with something lighter from your perspective, so we can avoid creating trouble for everyone."

'I'll dance naked if you want,' would be the thought going through these goon's head. That much even I can guess myself.

Dorothy smiles.

"Then bark like a dog for me."

"W, what?!"

"I told you, bark like a dog. Or are you thinking of staying human and taking a trip down hell's abyss?"

Trampling and reigning over their pride; I can only feel shivering cruelty from Dorothy now.

Compared to what she's doing right now, what she's been doing to me all this time is mischievous jokes at best.

Yes.

They're actually barking like dogs. Kneeling and groveling, in that exact position.

It's too miserable to even look at them with both eyes open.

And Lily was suddenly by my side, appearing like a ghost from god knows when before.

Well, who knows?

If this brat had appeared sooner, these guys could have got away without suffering this cruel and miserable punishment, save for some broken arms and legs.

To call this "you reap what you sow"... The weight of karma is too heavy to ignore.



That day afternoon.

Like it's always been, the three Blackhazel siblings are enjoying their dinner.

"Onii-sama."

Maria opens her mouth first, midway through the silent meal.

With a ring resonating from her dinner plate, her voice spreads throughout, like a clear bell.

"Have you noticed the new bed in your room?"

"Hmm? Ah, yeah."

Maria continues her words, her eyes still focused on her knife and fork.

"Though you haven't done so yet, it's immoral for a man and woman to even think about sleeping on the same bed. From now on, Lily will sleep there."

"Ahaha, don't you think you're being too sensitive to a 12-year-old..."

"Haven't you heard the saying: 'It is always the quiet ones'?"

"Not to mention that you're an uncontrollable lolicon that gets horny off 12-year-olds."

Looking at Maria cutting off my every sentence and getting angry, I'd say she's been thinking about this for quite a while. But I don't know why she's using that proverb here? I'm not sure if you're trying to say that I have an urge to go climb on a roof or something.

"Onee-sama, an electronic bracelet pioneer like him needs to be just castrated right off so he can at least be useful to the society."

"Uwah, you! Don't say something horrifying like that so casually!"

Tightening my legs up in reflex, I frown at Dorothy.

I don't know how a 17-year-old girl like her can even think about saying such horrendous words out of the blue. Ugh, I'm losing faith in humanity. Humanity, I

say.

“Do you understand, Onii-sama? From now on, Lily will sleep on the new bed in your room.”

Maria speaks while sipping her cup of coffee, after patiently listening to my bickering between me and Dorothy.

“Ah, alright.”

“And about that.”

“Hmm?”

“About the hijacking that took place before.”

Just after I nod my head in agreement, Maria changes the topic with gusto.

I really can't get used to Maria's pace of taking care of things. Is it because of her pragmatic nature trying to get right to the point? Not that it'd be any surprise.

“I have an idea as to who is the one behind the curtains here.”

“An idea?”

“Yes. Because of that, I have some information I'd like to inform to you, Onii-sama.”

Wiping her mouth with her napkin, Maria continues on.

“First off, about the 'family meeting' that will take place in Hotel de Bilderberg in Netherland in few days' time.”

Huh?

I could swear we were just talking about the hijack just now.

“The reason why I'm talking about the family meeting now, of all times, is because the two matters are closely related.”

“They're related?”

Now what kind of enigmatic puzzle is she talking about?

Even so, Maria remains composed, her dull poker face etched into her expression. It's so serious, I can't even find the willpower to throw her a joke.

"It's because..."

With an unnerving pause in her sentence, she slices through her food and takes a bite. And silently, she takes a breath.

"The group that's responsible for helping the 'Blades of the Left' infiltrate the cruise, and disguising it as cruise hijacking is no other than..."

"No other than...?"

"The other faction of the Blackhazel family."



"So all this began because of this family feud between the different factions in the family or whatever..."

It's like one of those fight-to-the-death families you see on the morning dramas.

And I'm right in the middle of it.

To be honest, I was half-dragged to the Blackhazel Manor knowing nothing, so it's safe to say that I'm wrapped up in this bloodthirsty family feud as well.

But Maria is different.

That girl probably knew from the beginning; that their retaliation and their tenacity would cause an unimaginable storm.

It's not something you could compare to prides Jewish people have, but I'm aware that the Aryans from Europe, particularly those that established their wealth and power through a network of family and tribes, take enormous pride in the "blood" of their family.

And even then, Maria went through everything, just to bring me to this place.

But how was I worth that trouble?

Even if I'm her brother sharing half the blood, there was no need for her to sacrifice this much for a brother she doesn't even remember how he looks like.

Any normal reasoning would lead to that conclusion.

Letting my imagination run wild, I head to the bathroom. Behind my back is Lily, stuck like glue as usual. Just where are you not planning to follow me into? You usually waited on the chair by the hallway while I was in the bathroom.

"Yo, I'm going to take a quick shower. Wait here, okay?"

\**Shake shake\**

Lily shakes her head sideways, disapproving. She's still got a hold of my clothes, with no thought of releasing anytime soon.

"Just a second, I'm gonna ask you this to avoid any misunderstanding. Are you planning to follow me into the bathroom?"

\**Nod nod\**

Lily's face flushes red with embarrassment and she still refuses to let go of me. Oh god, I've triggered one too many flags for her!

But she was always ready to tease and bully me along with Dorothy just a few days before, why is she being so attached now?!

"Uwah?! I'll take a really quick shower so just hold on for 5 minutes then!"

\**Shake shake\**

\**Shake shake\**

Shaking your head like that twice means you're not going to listen twice as much? It's a simple body language to understand. Not that I'd be interested in it much.

"How can a grown-up girl like you, even think about washing yourself with another man?! No!"

“Lily, still a child...”

“Don’t use an innocent excuse like that here!”

You little brat- No, if I said that, then I’m only acknowledging that she’s still a child, and therefore it’s alright for her to come. And so, the unavoidable three-stage acknowledgement would be completed.

That’s why I can’t say it. I won’t say it.

“But Lily, still little...”

“Just because you’re little you think you can come to the bathroom with me?”

“You, genius...?”

Nice counter. A cannon to demolish the wall of logic.

“W, whatever, but no is a no!”

If that’s the case then it’s time for me to say goodbye with logical reasoning as well. To use an analogy, it’s like trying to ignore a child begging her parents to buy her a toy.

“...Uu, hau.”

Lily undergoes a change in her plan, making a doe-like expression at me, with tears glistening under her eyes. It’s as if she’s trying to say “Even if I’m like this...?” to me.

Goddamn, she’s driving me mad. What am I supposed to do now.

And just when I was driven into this irreversible corner:

“What is with all the commotion?”

Suddenly Maria shows up from downstairs, looking for the source of the noise. She’s like a messiah to me; well, let’s pretend she is for the moment.

“Ohhh, Maria, I’m glad to see you!”

“...?”

If I think about it, Maria's been thinking of Lily as a rival of some sort lately. It's unorthodox and delusional at best, but maybe I can use that to my advantage here.

"Listen to me here, Maria! I'm trying to take a shower in the washroom but Lily's keep insisting that she come inside with me!"

"....Protecting by side, Lily's duty."

"Oh god, give me a break!"

Perhaps she assumed what was going on correctly; Maria nods with a look of understanding on her face.

"Hmm, inside? It is true that those not in a relationship together entering the same bath is immoral indeed. In that case..."

Maria immerses herself deep in thought, and emerges with a look that says she's thought of a wonderful solution for this problem.

And her wonderful solution was...

"It seems that I will have to go in with you."

...Come again?

What nonsense are you sprouting now!

"Bathroom is a dangerous place, Onii-sama! If you by any chance slipped and broke your head, Ahhh! This girl shall never live with the guilt tormenting her conscience!"

"You really think a grown-up man would be afraid of that to go in the bath alone, logically speaki..."

Hmm? Oh wait.

Just then I've stopped speaking, realizing a great flaw in what I said.

Haha, logic.

What nonsense am I even talking about?

There's no way something stupid and illogical like what I've just said would ever have a chance to work in front of Maria!



Maria calmly undresses herself to have her white body reveal itself. Sounds of her clothes sliding off can be heard softly. Unable to look at her properly, I silently turn my head to focus on something else.

As soon as I said that I'd rather not take a bath, Maria declared "Overruled!" and proceeded to half-drag me to the bathroom.

It's really nerve-wrecking.

It really is nerve-wrecking.

In all my 18 years of not-too-short life, no matter how hard I think, I don't think I was in a situation more nerve-wrecking than this. Ahhh, God, Buddah, Allah, whoever or wherever you are, please offer me a way out of this situation.

"Er, hmm, hey, Maria."

Not knowing where to set my eyes to, I mumble while staring at the ceiling.

"This is going to sound weird, but do I really have to take my clothes off?"

"Were you thinking of washing yourself while dressed, Onii-sama?"

Maria tilts her head, curious.

"It's not a bad suggestion."

"It's a tasteless joke."

"I think the situation we're in right now is more tasteless."

"There's nothing strange about this."

"No, believe me, it's strange."

Well, as we exchange trivial chatters across, the situation continues to take a turn

for the worse. Yes, to disaster. In a sense, it's as if a train travelling at 350km/h suddenly derailed onto the wrong side of the tracks.

"Quickly Onii-sama, undress yourself. Or would you prefer this girl to undress you herself?"

"Your brother is thinking of taking a bath clothed."

"There's no need to be shy, Onii-sama♪"

"No, being shy is the least of my concern here."

Despite me shaking my head fiercely rejecting her proposal, there's no stopping Maria.

"Aahhh! Could it be that you're having problem undressing by yourself? Then this girl, lacking as she is, will do her best to help you out!"

"Okay, stop there!"

Hearing Maria's footsteps approaching me, I turn around hastily in panic to try to stop he....r, and...

"Kuphup!"

It's obvious what was behind me.

Maria was standing naked before me, with not a string covering her. In an instant my face blushes up. I could feel something dripping down my nose. I wipe away the uncomfortable feeling away, only to find Maria shouting back at me, with her eyes locked into me in surprise.

"O, Onii-sama? Your nose is bleeding!"

Maria panics, not knowing what to do. I hope she knows that she's the one responsible for this.

There's no way she would know.

Maria's naked body is like a statue of a Greek goddess, made by an ancient artisan, with the utmost care and craftsmanship. Breasts that are just the right size. Body

lines that could be considered the prime of arc; definitive without any doubt. What's in is in, and what's out is out- skins whiter than the ripest of peaches. Straight honey-blond hair, wet with the humidity in the air, whirling around.

Without a sign of confusing, the heterochromatic eyes of gold and azure that looks on straight.

She's the personification of beauty itself.

I find out staring back at Maria, the side of mine I was unable to control by myself.

I bend down to wipe my nose with a tissue. Perhaps she's aware of what has happened; Maria flushes, red with embarrassment.

“This body of mine, is it that beautiful?”

Dying her face red like a ruby, Maria asks. Underneath her word, I could sense the pride she took in her appearance.

“Er, yeah.”

Regaining my composure a moment too late, I answer back in a stupor. Not like I would answer back differently if I had my senses.

Being prideful about yourself is important for your self-esteem, no? Though this isn't the best time to bring this subject up.

“But, wouldn't it be better to do it... separately?”

I think I know what her answer is going to be.

“I won't allow it.”

Without a moment of hesitation, it's overruled. Maria's stance is formidable, as if she won't allow any exception.

But I can't back down now.

“Didn't you say that it was a problem for grown up man and woman to take a bath together?”

"Perhaps. But are we not siblings? Is it that much of a problem for family members to take a bath together?"

"...You're driving me mad."

This analogy here could be a bit exaggerated, but this is comparable to getting your virginity taken away. If a man can't protect his own virginity, then he can't protect anything else!

"Hurry up and undress yourself. How will I help you take a bath if you don't?"

But I don't have time to argue about something as trivial as that. I have something else I have to focus on at the moment.

"I'm not going to take my clothes off!"

"What is so embarrassing about showing a sibling your body? I can't understand."

"No, a normal person would understand."

"If Onii-sama is that much against it, then I will have to resort to force."

So it's rape?!

It's basically a senseless strength contest now. So something like this is called checkmate? I don't see what else I can do.

My loss.

"Fuu, alright, alright. It's not like I have any choice this far into it."

"Aha, excellent choice. ♪"

Twitching like my muscles are paralyzed, I take my clothes off in a stiff fashion. And finally, using a towel to cover myself, I take my underwear off.

Ahhh, I'm going mad. So my pride as a man is already nothing but a rock stuck deep down in the abyss of the underworld?

"Is this g, good then."

“Look at you! I knew Onii-sama could do it if you put your mind into it.”

Does this look like a matter of bravery to you?!

She’s talking like a mom complimenting her child for finishing all the peppers on his plate. With all due respect, this isn’t something as simple as that.

“Then, this girl will help wash you now. Please, make yourself comfortable here.”

Looking at how the situation is progressing, it’s only been a warm-up exercise until now. Just thinking about the fate that awaits me sends a chill up my spine.

Unable to resist Maria’s urging, I sit on the stool and inch my legs closer.

“Please remove the towel as well.”

“This is my last line of pride as your brother.”

“Are you thinking of letting your pride getting drenched with water?”

Nice argument. But it won’t work against me, Maria. The towel stays where it is.

“I think that’ll be better.”

“That won’t do. Please hand it over, or this girl will...”

“Like I said, I’m not goin- Whoa, whoa?! I got it! Hang on!”

Ahhh. So after having Maria boldly inch closer to remove the towel herself, I hastily toss the towel aside. This reason is simple. In terms of position, the situation was that Maria’s breasts were nearing to touch my shoulder.

This is not good.

Really not good at all.

God of virginity, lend me your strength.

Well, not that a god like that would exist in the first place.

“Please Onii-sama, calm yourself and accept this girl’s service in peace.”

“I can manage washing myself alone, I think?”

“That won’t do. This is the devotion this girls offers to her one and only Onii-sama♡”

Maria takes hold of the shower head and checks the temperature of the water.

The time it takes for the water temperate to warm up is about 5 seconds. Maria flattens herself on me and meticulously works on washing my body.

A dreamy feeling of sinking gently. A perception of rising slowly from deep underwater. It’s a sensation that’s hard to describe. And the occasional touch of Maria’s body, soft and silky, and from Maria’s long and slender fingers were hard for me to even endure through.

Just where she touched, it makes me scared just by thinking about it.

After I was sufficiently wet, Maria turned off the shower head. Reaching for the soap nearby, she lathers it to make bubbles.

And then with the soap towel nearby...

She doesn’t reach for it!

With the lather of bubbles in her hands, she slowly scrubs my back with it. Wait, hang on a second.

What the hell is going on here?

“Uwahh?! Yo, wait! Hang on hang on hang on! Wait a minute! Stop!”

Arching my back like a bow, I yell out desperately.

“What is the matter?”

“What is the matter? You really don’t know why?”

I don’t think she knows.

Maria tilts her head and answers back.

“As I thought, Onii-sama prefers my breasts rather than my hands...”

She's perfectly wrong here, this one!

“No, I'm saying this much I can do myself!”

“...Haahh.”

Maria shakes her shoulders and let out a light sigh. A gesture that she's giving up due to pressure. Yes, this is what I wanted.

And so, unable to go against my defiant refusal, Maria, who had no choice,

Whips around my back and hugs me from behind.



“Ufuf?”

It's like I just grabbed onto an exposed electric wire, damp with water; that's what I felt.

The soft feeling enveloping me from behind makes my nerves rise up in shock. My nerves register the naked flesh of Maria, and transmit it to my brain. I can't regain my composure now.

And this slippery sensation that I feel from behind is Maria's...

Ahh, if my thoughts have reached that far, then it's time for me to stop thinking.

It's like I've been hit with a home run from the last enemy batter when the bases were loaded with two batters out with it taking place on the 9th inning.

Yes.

To make it simpler, you could imagine my soul draining out of my mouth to get a feel of it.

“Ma, Maria? Why so suddenly?!”

“...As I thought, Onii-sama, do you not remember?”

But contrary to my expectation, Maria's voice was accompanied by not with force, but with shaky uncertainty.

Just like before.

Just like before, her influence was so much that she was changing the atmosphere with just the power of emotions inside her.

“It's not that I expected you to remember. After all, everything this girl remembers come from nighttime tales father used to tell.”

Unable to transition into Maria's sudden change of dialogue, my lack of foresight makes me panicky and unaware.

“When the two of us were young, we would use to bathe like this often.”

If Dorothy ever got a wind of that, she'll probably get a heart attack on the spot.

"He told us other interesting stories as well. Like the time Onii-sama stole mother's ring as a present for me, or the time two of us went to Disneyland together."

"..."

Well, that's all well and good, but can you think about letting me go anytime soon? With you stuck to me so close, I can't even begin to think straight in this position.

"As the head of the Blackhazel Family's kingdom, I had to adapt to tight and strict schedules every day. Respite was only a luxury for me. People only regarded me as a figure of respect, and no one wanted to get close to me."

Bit of a background story; as to how she became the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 .

"And every time fatigue got to me, I thought of the story father had told me."

"Thought..?"

"That I had my one-and-only Onii-sama somewhere."

Her voice had a trace of deep nostalgia echoing from it.

I can assume as to what kind of environment Maria grew up in, and what she had to do inside. Presumably, it would be painful beyond imagination, something plebeians like me can't even begin to think about.

"No matter how lonely or tired I was, it was that thought that carried me until today."

Maria gathers more strength to hug me tighter from behind. The feeling of our skin touching grows ever so clearly.

"Yes, this girl has only dreamed of this moment like this with her Onii-sama."

She sounded delighted, and yet a faint sense of sadness could be sensed from her voice.

"Every day before I went to sleep at night, I thought of what kind of person Onii-

sama would be like. Would he be gentle? Would he be cool? Or would he be someone with a sense of humour? Just imagining about what Onii-sama would be like was enough to make me happy and happier. I would fall asleep optimistically joyful, glistening with tears of happiness.”

“...Ahaha, then I guess you were disappointed.”

“Why do you think that?”

You’re really asking that.

No idiot in this world would think that the me here could possibly match your description of prince charming from a fairy tale.

“Well, I’m not like any of the person you were thinking I was...”

“What are you talking about?”

But Maria does not approve my disapproval.

Rather, she put on a bright smile like a child, and whispers gently into my ear.

“Onii-sama is exactly like the Prince Charming I was expecting along.”



Maria lathers soap bubbles in her hands and carefully rubs near my shoulder blades. Sensation of white slippery bubbles envelops me.

“This girl’s service... Does it feel good, Onii-sama?”

“Hmm? Ah, yeah.”

To be honest, I don’t know what to do. It’s not like I can refuse her after hearing what she’s been through earlier. This girl’s really good at bending people her way. You could try resisting, but in the end you get wrapped inside her pace.

“There’s no need to be uncomfortable like that. This girl’s doing this because she wants to.”

Maria speaks, laughing softly.

But I'm already so uncomfortable that my head's about to cave in. Skinship is skinship, but this is just ridiculous. Exactly why can't you realize that?

Not like complaining about it now would do any good anyway...

I really can't adjust myself to her tempo she runs in.

Bouncing this way and that way, it's like a rhapsody that you can't predict.

Normally, I bet even high school first-love couples wouldn't progress their relationships at this fast of a speed.

But if you think about it, the case that I was in it was light-speed away from what anyone would call "normal".

Ahh, I was foolish.

I feel like I'm paralyzed beyond the doctor's control.

Maria's soft fingers that massage every nook and cranny on my body with the utmost care.

This irresistibly lovable feeling.

It's something that not even the 《Princess of Pure Darkness》 could ever do.

And her unexpected frailty and femininity only seem more lovable to me at the moment.

But why.

It's foreign feeling I've never experienced before.

Then, with my sister, should I have...?

No good.

I catch my train of thoughts, shaking my head.

"All done, Onii-sama."

After some pass of time, Maria speaks.

Turing on the shower head again, she meticulously wipes away my soap-sodden body. The smell of water, soap and Maria's scent mixes together to excite my sense of smell.

"Now that the washing is done, shall we go in the bathtub together?"

Maria smiles, rising slowly.

It's something I didn't think of before.

"Wh, What? Well, to go that far..."

I stutter and try to think of an excuse, but after looking at Maria, gazing back at with an icy stare that says "Got a problem?", just what power do I have to resist her?

And so, shot down with just a glare, I nod my head back in defeat.

"My defeat. Yep."

And so, after filling the bath with warm water, Maria enters first. I enter after her, my muscles and body half-stiffen like a palsied patient. The only thing I can do is crouch down and curl up to take up as less space as possible.

"Come closer here. There is nothing to be ashamed of."

Maria slants her head, gesturing me to get closer.

Not knowing what to do, I do nothing but submerge my face halfway into the bath, making bubbles with my mouth.

A memory from when I was young? It happened just so long ago than I can't even think about how much time has went past. I was left to the daycare when I was five so, it happened just when I graduated from being a toddler.

And I'm not a child anymore.

Nor Maria, nor me.

But it's not like I have any better excuse to tell her; I'm out of options here.

I had no choice but to watch Maria come closer to me and rest her head against my body, not knowing what else to do.

Through mine and Maria's body, I can feel our temperature travelling through the two of us.

It's warmth. Warmth that's enough to protect me from any cold, even if I was swimming naked in the Arctic, freezing to death.

When I was deep into such thoughts, Maria quietly opens her mouth.

"But Onii-sama, did you know?"

"Hmm?"

"Onii-sama's stiff 'thing', it's been poking me in the back for a while now."

"Fuhuup-?!"

I cough uncontrollably in surprise. Chuckling, Maria continues on.

"So you were getting excited over your sister's body, Onii-sama."

"So, sorry! Then I'll..."

I fluster in panic, and quickly tries to get out of the bath.

However, Maria pays it no attention, and turns around to wrap around my back.

"It's fine, On the contrary, I am happy? It means Onii-sama sees this girl as a full-fledged woman now."

"Bu, but."

I try to mutter together an excuse, but I have no choice but to only sit down silently without saying anything.

"All you have to do is stay beside me like this from now on, Onii-sama."

Maria whispers to me, again resting her body upon mine.



Having finished with the bath, I return to my room in a state of great confusion. I reflect back on the conversation I had with Maria in the bath.

Have I ever thought of Maria as a “little sister” ever before?

I met Maria when she suddenly busted into my high school classroom and dragged me here against my will. I only had a hunch that she was a mass of trouble that only did things her way, but in the end, I never really considered that she was my blood-related sister.

But half of my blood that flows within my veins is those of a Blackhazel. And everything that has happened, and the changes that took place, happened because of me here.

Yes.

“My responsibility, is it?”

It’s not something I can just breeze past, thinking about what a good opportunity it is for me to do something; it’s not like that.

But if you asked me saying what I could possibly do in a situation, the answer would be ‘nothing’. Sad as it is, I can’t do anything but rely on Maria for every single thing, like someone that’s been paralyzed from the waist down.

In other words, an indecisive situation of awkwardness.

Scratching my head in an uncaring fashion, I sit down on the side of my bed. But sadly I couldn’t lie down. There was an unexpected guest already occupying the space.

“That’s my space?”

“Hmph, Lily... knows too.”

“If you know, then can you move? Your spot is the bed Maria prepared for you over there.

\*Shake shake\*

Denying me flatly, Lily flips over facing the other side.

First Maria, and now her. It seems that nothing in my life ever goes my way. I want to live a peaceful life, you know.

“So then should I sleep on the new bed then?”

Can’t help it then. If she doesn’t want to sleep on the new bed then I can’t help her.

\*Shake shake\*

“Uwah?! Then what do you want me to do!”

“You, sleep here...”

“Erk!”

Sleep here you say. I really don’t want to do that and have Maria and Dorothy misunderstand things again.

“What happened yesterday was because there was no other place for you to sleep then, but from today, it’s different!”

“Not different.”

“You’re driving me nuts!”

“Bodyguard by side, Lily’s duty...”

That repertoire again. It’s getting sickeningly familiar to me now.

But I can’t just stand here and let her do things her way. I’ll think of a comeback she can’t get out of.

“You slept in front of a door fine, all this time!”

And with that, Lily starts sweating slightly like she’s nervous, and whispers in a barely audible voice.

“Lily, hard Korean words... Don’t know.

Oho, so you’re using that now. Not that I used any hard words for her. Well, I’ll go with her for now. It’s not like I’d get anything by arguing with her like this. I’d doubt a rice cake would just fall from the sky for me.<sup>1</sup>

『Feo Pafisto』, killing machine or whatever, I’m fine with that.

To me, Lily is just a little girl, little Lily.

Letting out a small laugh, I ruffle through Lily’s hair. With that, Lily closes her eyes and purrs like a pleased kitten. Who in the world would think she’s scary or whatever?

“Eh, whatever.”

Lying down beside Lily with a soft thud, I mutter to myself.

<sup>1</sup> Korean proverb meaning “unexpected reward”.

## IV. Maria :: She is the law (2)

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/001.

Time flows on, and few days later.

Not including Dorothy; Me, Maria, and Lily are at the Bilderberg hotel, located in Oosterbeek, Netherland, a popular resort for tourists.

I asked Maria as to why Dorothy wasn't here with us, to which she replied with "This event does not concern her". As we near our destination, I know fully well that the idle time I could spend like this was nothing short of luxury.

Yes.

This is clearly my problem to solve.

Maybe my head's been gone a little funny under this intense pressure. Someone said it's human nature to lose rational judgement when they're driven into a corner; I think they were talking about me.

It was someone who hired a bunch of armed terrorists to dispose of us, like it was nothing. Thankfully the situation concluded as an "attempted" hijacking.

Another "Blackhazel" that I've never seen before, other than Maria and Dorothy.

I can assume for myself what this 'hatred of Blackhazel' symbolizes. And this fear I feel when I think that this 'hatred' is directed straight at me. Judging by how Maria and Dorothy's been acting, I think I can figure out that much.

'I really don't want these guys as enemies.' That's what I'm feeling right now.

And from what Maria has told me, they're clearly bearing their fangs right at me. Like a raging brute.

"Are you nervous, Onii-sama?"

Maria, seated next to me, looks to my side with a worried look on her face.

"Ah? Er, well, just a bit."

“Are you afraid of them?”

It's all because of you, geez.

The person who made me realize what ‘fear of Blackhazel’ symbolized.

“I, I guess so? Probably.”

Maria immerses herself in her thoughts momentarily.

And suddenly, she reaches forward and grabs my hand. Maria urges me in a gentle and calm voice, catching me surprised by the skinship I didn't expect.

“I can understand the worries that are going through your head right now.”

“Ahaha.”

I awkwardly scratch the back of my head.

“But remember. This girl will always be right beside you, by Onii-sama’s side.”

“Ah, okay.”

“Yes. Even if the whole world turns against you, just remember that I will always be on Onii-sama’s side – please never forget that.”

It does sound promising.

“I am Maria Lunalady Blackhazel. The one and only master of the Blackhazel family, in possession of all the wealth there is to exist in this world. I myself will protect Onii-sama with all of my strength. There is nothing to fear.”

Yes.

No matter how rancorous the Blackhazel family can be towards me, baring their fangs, Maria is the one and only master of the Blackhazel family. She is on the apex of hierarchy.

What she said is definitely giving me some strength.

Maria then reaches into her pockets, fumbling for something.

“But before that, Onii-sama, I have something to show you.”

Embraced within her grasp is a single photograph.

“This is...?”

On the photograph is a boy and a girl, no more than four or five years old. Judging by the dazzling heterochromatic eyes of azure and gold, the girl is Maria.

Smiling like a child, Maria has a balloon in her hand.

The boy is hugging her from behind, laughing away mischievously.

Then this boy is...

“Do you remember? It’s a picture of me and Onii-sama, from when we were young.”

This boy is... me?

A boy like this, hugging and laughing with Maria like it’s nothing, is really me?

“It feels strange.”

Maria smiles upon me, while I laugh awkwardly.

“Do you understand now? This girl will continue to make more and more fond memories with Onii-sama, like we have before.”

Call it a defiant willpower? Well, I’m not sure if there’s a way to describe what I’m feeling from her right now.

“To sum it up.... This girl will never, ever give up on Onii-sama.”

“Haha.”

In a situation like this, I really don’t know how I should respond to her.

“Whether it’s the other Blackhazel family member or an omnipotent, omniscient god...”

“God, you say.”

“Nothing in this world can tear apart this feeling I hold for my Onii-sama.”

Realizing the truth embedded inside her words, I could take a brief glimpse inside the feeling she held towards me.

I’m positively sure there’s not many people that can even dare to go up against Maria’s willpower straight on.

Even If they can, I’m not betting that they’ll come out in one piece.

Even if that person really is god itself.

Yes.

This girl is dependable to the point where it starts to feel uncomfortable. In a sense, you could say that I’m worrying and fussing too much about it.

And no matter what happens, I always have my capable bodyguard Lily beside me.

It’s not like I’m walking into the gates of hell or anything, it’s just a ‘family meeting’ to discuss about matters and suggestions here and there.

Let them come. I can take ‘em.



Travelling past the Dutch border, we arrive at the Hotel de Bilderberg’s heliport, located on the roof of the hotel.

“We have been waiting for you, Master.”

There awaits a group of men dressed in suits to greet us. They somewhat lacked the soft humanistic quality most of us have, but rather, an air of professional coldness could be felt around these men in black.

“There is no need for formalities. Please, escort us to the conference room.”

Maria, in turn, replies back in an monotonous voice devoid of emotion. Talk about simple: she’s cutting all the useless formalities aside and skipping right to the issue.

It's simple to the point of being cruelly efficient.

But as soon as we move our feet to proceed to the room, one of the men steps forward to stop us.

Facing Maria, who seems to be confused as to what is going on, the man explains.

"Carrying weapons inside the conference is forbidden. I would ask you to leave the weapons that child over there carries with us for the time being."

Aha, so it was something like that.

But contrary to my expectation, Maria narrows her eyes to a slit in suspicion, and replies back in protest.

"How rude. Just who do you think I am?"

"We're only following the rules, ma'am."

"You speak as if I will massacre everyone inside the conference hall."

"There's no telling if you will."

These men wearing straight poker face aren't too bad with their words, either.

"You, how dare...!"

Maria is the first to show her emotional side and display her rage. But moments later, she regains her composure, and hold out a gesture for Lily.

Lily nods in dull silence, and steps forward to the man in suit.

"First, the violin case."

"..."

Lily quietly hands over the violin case.

But as soon as the man in suit take a hold of the violin case:

"-Urf?"

He collapses on the spot, unable to take the weight of the case.

At the same time, Lily dashes forward and dives into the chest of a different man, and let loose two consecutive jabs. Perhaps he was underestimating the power of her jabs: the man falls to his knees, clutching his chest in pain, clearly suffering from a formidable impact.

“You brat!”

And the men take on a formation around Lily, a situation that is all too familiar.

But even these poker face men in black, skilled as they are, can’t possibly go up against Lily. In a sense, think of Lily as an anonymous Swordmaster so-and-so (19, former high school student) shouting off to the enemy grunts, “The reason you can’t win against me is because you guys use shields!” Ever thought about why the protagonist, who wears less armor than a regular soldier, can survive through anything?

Approaching the man, Lily grabs his arm and twists it 180 degrees. She approaches a different man nearby, and unleashes a jab on his face.

“Arrgh!”

Teeth shatter, and noses break. You guys really are progressive when it comes to receiving injuries. Well, let’s say Lily is progressive when it comes to inflicting injuries.

And so, the situation draws to a finale.

“Hmph. Lily, never hand it over...”

All this happened before the man who received the violin case had the time to get up and regain his posture.

Call it split-second, lighting-fast, but the point is that it happened in a blink of an eye.

But really, all you had to do was hand the weapons over, was there really a need to brandish violence idiotically like this?

Maria, who seems to have read the thoughts going through my head, adds on her

explanation as to what happened.

"If Lily really did hand over her weapons, then these men would have shot us down where we were standing."

"What?"

"These men are fake."

While I try to piece together what Maria has told me, a disdainful smile appears on her face as she gazes at me.

"The real guards that's supposed to be here should be sinking to the bottom of the lake somewhere."

With that, Maria waltzes inside the hotel entrance without a moment's delay, with an air of coolness.

...

I said in a sense, you could say that I'm worrying and fussing too much about it.

It's not like I'm walking into the gates of hell or anything, it's just a 'family meeting' to discuss about matters and suggestions here and there.

Oh my God.

It wasn't as simple as that!



Coming down a floor from the hotel roof, we board the elevator at the 40th floor.

The conference room is right below the hotel penthouse, a second penthouse in hiding, if you will. Since it's different from the regular penthouse open to the public, According to Maria, it's impossible to enter by conventional means, nor is its existence known. You could only enter the room by swiping a special premium card in the elevator.

So, normally the floor itself wouldn't even be marked. With that, the hotel 'penthouse' would be located at the 41st floor, and the real 40th floor existed just

for this secretive conference to take place in.

After the card was swiped into the elevator, the elevator heads to the Secret Floor: 40, and stops on it.

As the door opens, a dull light shines on the Greek-style marble exterior and the Renaissance-esque paintings inside. The floor of the lobby is covered in undeniably exquisite carpet. It feels like I'm entering the hideout of a sinister league of evil somewhere.

"I have few things to ask of you."

"Hmm?"

Maria opens her mouth to speak, just before we try to step inside the lobby.

"To get you started, those that await us inside are nothing but a mass of greed in human skin."

"..."

Within Maria's voice, I could sense an unimaginable hatred of deepest rancor, imbued with her every words.

"No matter what taunt or threat they may use, Onii-sama must never react nor reply to it at any cost."

"I got it."

"And no matter what, do not look them in the eyes. Keep your sight straight, but please look to the wall behind them if you must."

"Er, alright."

Pretty detailed command she's giving out.

"If you cross eyes with them by coincidence, do not look away or do anything that is considered submissive. Just smile lightly, give a little nod, and look away gently."

I think I can understand where she's getting at.

Do not be seen submissive. Keep your formalities, but keep your pride up, act like a Blackhazel would act against another Blackhazel, befitting of your heritage.

“I understand where you’re getting at.”

“And finally, another thing.”

“...There’s still some left?”

“Yes. This is the one most important thing you absolutely must keep in mind.”

Like what she’s asking of me now isn’t enough.

But contrary to my pessimistic expectations running rampant, Maria does nothing but hold my hand tightly and give off a gentle smile.

“Remember. I will always be on Onii-sama’s side.”

“...”

She’s really got a talent for making me feel needlessly uneasy.

But the words she’s saying do sound promising.

“Okay, shall we get going then?”

“Yes.”

Maria lessens her grip on my hands. Me and Lily once again continues our walk, our steps matching that of Maria.

Towards the other Blackhazels.



They are the nameless conquerors.

The incidents they have plotted and schemed from the shadows dot the pages of history. Their wealth are divided up to funds, loans, gold, or priceless artworks; it takes on many forms, and they are present in underground factions everywhere.

The Swiss Bank, FRB (Federal Reserve Board), IMF, and many other secretive systems and services control and manage the wealth this world has.

Wars and revolutions, depressions, civil movements...

While numerous countries and governments have gone through the ups and downs with the flow of time, the kingdom they have erected has never experienced a shake in their foundation.

Authority is as fragile as a candle is to a gust of wind, but wealth is a matter of solid trust, never failing to materialize.

In their kingdom, there are no citizens, nor are there territories.

There exists only a solitary emperor, its sole citizen and deputy.

Therein lies the empire, dubbed with the name 'Blackhazel'.

Bounded by the shackles of blood, the chains that wound shut, forbidding escape from anyone inside.

They are the dark hands that guide forth the world's economy, hiding behind veils of shadow.

"You are late, Master Maria."

Opening the door, I could see about five to six men and women waiting inside.

They were sitting around the circular table and their vivid rancor could be felt from their gaze headed towards my way, to the end of the table.

"It has been a long time, elders of the Blackhazel family."

"There's no need for useless greetings. Let's get right to the point."

A man of age, with a long beard and tall posture, opens his mouth to reply.

That's that, but cutting right to the point seems to be the characteristics of this family I'm in.

"You seemed to have prepared a fun little trick for me, uncle."

When you say ‘fun little trick’, then is she talking about the...

“Hmph. I never expected you to get swindled by those uneducated fools in the first place. Think of it as a little play.”

And this person who regards something horrifying like that as a play isn’t going to be easy to deal with, either.

“‘Play’, you say.”

Maria snaps her finger as a gesture for Lily.

Bang!

And at the same time, Lily pulls out a pistol from underneath her coat and fires a shot towards her uncle.

“Something like that can’t even be considered a play, at best.”

But the bullet whizzes past his head and lodges itself in the wall behind him.

This person called Maria’s uncle must’ve seen this coming; he only sat there with a cold smile, chuckling slightly.

Nothing here is normal.

Even if she did miss. How many people in this world could just sit there and not even blink their eyes, with a bullet whizzing right past you?

It’s a façade I can’t even begin to imagine.

Call it unflinching? It’s a façade that normal people can’t even begin to recreate.

Not only that, but no one inside the conference room seemed to have found it startling. If I didn’t know any better, I would have thought that everyone in this room was deaf.

“With this, we are even.”

“Do you understand just what you are doing right now?”

“I am only repaying what I have received.”

“I am not referring to that. I am referring to that disgusting yellow monkey standing right over there.”

Her uncle raises his voice and points to my way. But I stand unwavering. Like Maria said beforehand. I only gaze at the wall behind him, like a tombstone.

“Yellow monkey, how rude. This person is my Onii-sama.”

“So you dare defile the noble Blackhazel heritage with the pitiful blood of Asian race!?”

“Half the blood that flows through him is of rightful Blackhazel line. His blood is not that thin to be defiled by the pitiful Asian race.”

Mmhmm. So she doesn't deny the fact that half my blood is pitiful.

Not that I'm in any position to complain about it now here, of all place.

“I need not hear about such nonsensical excuses!”

“Master Maria. Will you defile the Blackhazel bloodline with a pitiful Asian blood, starting with the Decayed Blood (劣化の血)?”

Decayed Blood...?

What the hell are they talking about now?

“Until when will you stop letting such trivial traditions get in the way?”

In response to Maria shaking her shoulders and half-mocking the company, one of the family rises up to complain.

“How dare you call it trivial traditions! Just what do you take the Blackhazel bloodline for? It's a heritage born from emperors, a position that's destined to reign and dominate over plebeians!”

“Don't make me laugh, a heritage for emperors?”

Maria ridicules softly, and continues her words.

"Get over your delusions. What has made Blackhazel the way it is now is not due to bloodline. It has been forged by accomplishments our forefathers have created as past masters."

"How dare..."

"Creating the 'Bandersnatch' to how it is now, from the military industries in the two World Wars, and using that opportunity to gain funding and financial cooperation around the world. What established our family Konzern is due to the works and efforts of my grandfather 'Melbourne Reviere Blackhazel' and my father 'Donovan Sanchez Blackhazel.'"

"So what you are saying, Master Maria, is that you are choosing to ignore the rest of the family tradition that has been established?"

Contrary to the aura of negativity ticking away in the conference room, Maria remains in her silence in response.

After a while, the woman on the very right looking to be in her late 20's opens her mouth to break the silence.

"I understand what you mean, Maria-san. However, that does not give the monkey over there any right to join us as a member of the family."

A beauty speaks, retaining her tranquillity with a serene smile on her face.

A flowing ponytail behind her, hair blazing with red, and wearing a dress evoking a sense of sophistication. She has eyes like an eagle, like a predator about to strike. The image she gives out seems to resemble an office secretary at a glance.

"And this is the second time Maria-san's been 'stubborn' about something, I'm sure you're aware of that~."

Chuckling rather mischievously, she speaks as if she's merely joking with her words. But even so, I could sense potent venom and sharp daggers inside her eyes.

Judging by odd apprehension running through Maria's face, I could sense that the power this woman's words held was greater than any of the family member here.

In terms of intimidation, an absolute first, excluding Maria.

“The reason why we called out Maria-san for this ‘family meeting’ is because of question for this matter on hand... but more importantly, it’s to discuss about Maria-san marriage that’s about to take place in the near future.♪”

“!”

“As I say, the earlier they’re established, the better relationships turn out to be. Don’t you agree, Heimlich-kun?”

“It’s true, Izabel-oneechan.”

Beside the red-haired lady called ‘Izabel’, is a man of similar age to her. With recognizable blond hair covering his head, he fitted the description for a typical handsome man. But the somewhat arrogant air around him didn’t give a good impression of him.

This guy, Heimlich, is he Maria’s fiancé or something...?

“You...”

Maria glares at them sharply, as if she’s discomfited.

But after a deep breath, she gradually regains her composure, and continues on in her clairvoyant voice.

“I’m sorry about the matter of marriage, but there was already a prior engagement for me, before Heimlich.”

“What?!”

“What are you talking about?”

With Maria’s declaration, a murmur breaks out around the room, full of curiosity and suspicion.

“This girl has already decided to give her heart to someone else.”

Someone she decided to give her heart to?

Maria is willing to devote her feelings to someone?

I don't know who the lucky guy is, but I can't really think of who it is, looking at Maria. Not that I particularly want to think about who it is.

Because in the end, matters about marriage should be left up to the persons involved.

"Yes, I, Maria Lunalady Blackhazel, have decided from the beginning to **conceive the child of my dear Onii-sama** right there."

"Fuuuhp-!"

But isn't she talking about me now?!

"W, wait a sec! Maria?!"

She did tell me to not speak a word and listen, but there's no way I can stay quiet after hearing that."

"Master Maria, so you really are planning to go that far against Blackhazel's..."

"I cannot approve of this suggestion!"

"Since it has come this far to your decision, I..."

Complaints burst from everywhere, all stating their confusion and disapproval.

Well, it's understandable. It's not unjustified complaints. I'd do the same thing if it was up to me. If some outsider hick just waltz by and suddenly decides to marry the family master all of a sudden, no idiot's just going to sit there and just let that happen.

But Maria silences the opposition, with a roar of her overpowering intimidation etched in her voice.

"It is not up to any of you to make the decision. That responsibility is up to me, master of the Blackhazel family, Maria."

"Even if you are the master, I cannot understand a decision as ludicrous as this!"

The family members give up on rational rebuttals, and resort to volume to yell out their disapprovals.

“For the sake of purity of blood, Blackhazel members may marry a relative related to their birthparents to preserve the authenticity of the bloodline.’ And so, I have not violated any ‘Blackhazel laws’ here.

“You really think an excuse as ridiculous as that will work here?”

“I wonder, has any of you ever heard of a story called ‘To call a deer a horse (指鹿爲馬)?’”<sup>1</sup>

“What!?”

Ignoring the family member’s responses that demanded explanation from her, Maria continued on her story serenely.

“According to the records from the early Chu–Han Contention, a prime minister by the name of Zhao Gao, of Qin dynasty, presented a deer to the Qin emperor as a present. He added on, ‘This is a horse.’, to which the emperor replied ‘You are mistaken, prime minister. Why do you call a deer a horse?’”

“...?”

Maybe, is Maria talking about the proverb “To call a deer a horse” I’m thinking of?

Thinking about that proverb I learned in my Kanji class, I mutter to myself inside.

“The emperor’s followers’ answers were split into three. Ignoring those that stayed silent, there was more people agreeing with Zhao Gao, stating ‘That really is a horse.’, compared to the minority who stated ‘That is not a horse.’, and disagreed with Zhao Gao.”

She’s driving me mad here.

“Here’s a question now. What do you think happened to those that disagreed with Zhao Gao, and did not pretend that the deer was a horse?”

Maria smiles coldly, and made a gesture of slitting her throat with her hand.

<sup>1</sup> This proverb roughly translates into “To trick and ridicule someone.”

“No one ever saw them afterward.”

Her voice was accompanied by a warm smile, something that didn’t fit her words at all.

Yes.

This was the true fear Maria was capable of causing.

You would argue back and forth, bickering here and then, and suddenly, you would find the discussion drifting toward Maria before you were even aware of it.

“Maria, you...”

Heimlich shoots up in his seat, unable to listen anymore.

Looking at him glowing blue and red with anger with veins popping up on the side of his head, I’m assuming he’s not the best-behaved knife in the drawer.

But even in situations like this, Izabel doesn’t lose herself. Izabel laughs softly to herself. She knew from the beginning that it was all a part of Maria’s plan to taunt them out.

The only exception to ‘them’.

“I see now that bloods do not betray their expectations. Really, you remind me of that person.”

“Dammit, Izabel-oneechan! This isn’t the time to laugh!”

Heimlich complains to her, in a matter most perplexing.

Looking at that, I can see how these two are supposed to be like. A relationship between a spoiled brother and a kind sister that grants his every wish, something like that.

“Don’t make me laugh, Maria! No matter what anyone says, you’re mine! I have no intention of letting that damned monkey over there take you away!”

Look at this guy talking now.

“Please don’t act so spoiled, Heimlich. It is a sight most unpleasant.”

“Eh? Spoiled?! Goddamn it, wasn’t it you who ignored the family law and went ahead to choose this damned monkey for yourself?”

“That is so. The person that I have chosen is Onii-sama, not you, Heimlich.”

“I won’t accept it! I’ll never accept it! Hey, Onee-chan, do something about this screwed-up situation!”

He really is spoiled, this guy.

But his sister, so Izabel, only observes the racket, laughing quietly to herself. As if she found this whole thing to be rather entertaining.

It’s obvious that I’m the one on the edge here.

It feels like I’m on the unfavourable end here.

“Maria-san? When I look at Maria-san, I can’t help but think that you’re a splitting image of that person.”

Maria is still not quick to lower her guard just yet.

The opponent is neither her uncle nor Heimlich. It’s that red-haired lady, Izabel. Not only is she not falling into any of the traps Maria has thought of, she’s even quick to think on her feet in response, while retaining her sense of humour.

“Yes, it seems that it’s time for us to take a step back.”

“A wise choice.”

While they both greet each other with an understandable smile, I’m sure they’re busy inside trying to get one step ahead of each other.

“Izabel! So you plan to agree to Master Maria’s senseless proposition once again?”

“Yes! Even for me, I cannot understand her suggestions at all!”

“Dammit, don’t just lump me up in this whole situation, Onee-chan!”



I think there was someone being useless at the end. Oh well, fine by me.

Izabel pacifies the oppositions with a lofty wave of her hands.

“But it cannot be helped, can it? The fact that we cannot simply overpower the family master’s decision has been proven long ago by our masters past.”

“But even so!”

“Or Johannes, do you have any other course of action for us to take at the time?”

“T, that is...”

I guess no one does.

“In that case, I guess that this conference draws to a close here.”

The conversation between these two is short and concise.

As if the root of their words are but gently colliding with each other.

“But by the way, I would like to ask you to keep this in mind.”

“What are you referring to?”

“We could never overpower the family master’s decision. But what took the lives of our two masters before was...”

“Was?”

“Their stubbornness, I am referring to.”

“Izabel, you-!”

With Izabel’s words, Maria unleashes her angers, like a displeased cat.

And,

Izabel was smiling.

She was oddly twisting the corners of her mouth, covering her face in a dark aura,

and was smiling like a beauty from a fairy tale.

A smile that somehow made me shiver.

I realize then.

What Maria had truly meant when she referred to them as “a mass of greed in a human skin”.

Maria no longer restrains her animosity. Only killing intent could be felt from her gaze. Dunning such eyes, Maria snapped her fingers in gesture.

“Lily!”

“Stingray.”

In response, Izabel also snapped her finger in signal.

In a moment, Lily draws the Tokarev pistol from her violin case and aims it.

And on Izabel’s side, an unknown man reveals himself from behind to protect his master.

No, I said protect, but his opponent were bullets fired from Lily’s 7.62mm Tokarev pistol.

There is no way he could do anything, even if he was Steven Seagal himself.

When I was thinking that:

Two gunshots.

I close my eyes to shut out the horrible aftermath, but there was nothing of the sort.

It seems Izabel was expecting this to happen; not even a trace of apprehension nor panic could be found on her face.

“Er...?”

While I was busy working out just what had happened here...

-.

A piece of metal, scrunched and shattered, of unidentifiable origin was rolling around on the floor.

No, wait, if what I'm seeing right now is correct, then perhaps....

Two gunshots. No aftermath whatsoever. A piece of metal rolling around, with their fronts knocked off, in the shape of an M.

Just how is this situation progressing. Is there some supernatural light novel battle being written here I'm not aware about?!

With that ridiculous idea inside my head, I turn my head to observe the man shielding Izabel in front of her.

There stood a man donned in a thick leather jacket and a casual pair of jeans, holding an automatic pistol in his hand. He looked to be someone of Indonesia, or of Thailand origin.

“...”

And with this unexpected flow of events, a look of astonishment could be seen on both Maria and Lily's face. Maria's unfittingly calm poker face could be seen trembling slightly.

“How interesting. Perhaps this was a part of your ‘play’, as well?”

Izabel shakes her hands at Maria, putting on an air of exaggeration.

“Do excuse me. Perhaps this kind of play was too much for some of our elders.”

Maria takes a step back, laughing awkwardly.

“Ah, but I am not! I am at heart, a 17 year old girl, just like you, Maria-san! I am not so aged that I become out of breath just because of a play of this level!”

With that, Izabel elevates the situation further.

“If that is the case... Shall we enjoy the rest of this play?”

Hearing Izabel's words, the south-Asian man steps forward from where he was standing. His gaze resembled eyes of a predator on the hunt, calmly approaching his prey.

"-Showtime!"

And so, the stage made way for the second act.



The unidentified man called 'Stingray' jumps onto the table from where he was standing and uses the tension to dash right to Lily.

In his hand was a tactical knife, emitting a dull glow as it emerged from his jackets.

Letting loose waves of destruction, the blade ran through thin air to reach the obstacle present in front.

By 'obstacle', it was clear that it referred to nothing else but Lily's white neck, cleanly exposed for the knife to prey on.

"...!"

The tactical knife was pressed against Lily's neck. Moving it even just a few centimeters further would be enough to cut through her throat, rend through her flesh, and sever her artery.

But for reason, the blade was poised still, not moving from where it was at. In a situation where finishing the job would only take the smallest effort.

Was he going easy on her?

If that was the case, then this guy – he was capable of overpowering and suppressing Lily in just a fraction of a second; perhaps he was showing off his superiority.

"That is not so."

The first to realize what was going on was none other than Maria. Though I was left wondering as to why Maria was smiling, but I could catch on as to what move Lily had made.

It's the same here, a knife.

Gripped within Lily's other hand was her very own tactical knife, poised to strike its deadly fangs right into where Ray's heart was.

In a sense, the situation ended in a tie.

"As expected from the 'Ladies in Black', strongest agents that Bandersnatch take pride in."

Chiming in third place, Izabel laughs in an entertained tone.

"Ray, it's really hard to find anyone who can go toe-to-toe against that child."

After a moment, Maria mutters to herself, realizing something from listening to Izabel.

"Infiltrating the Thailand Prime Minister's office single-handedly. A nameless killer responsible for eliminating several top-grade National Security officers and the assassination of the prime minister."

"Aha, so you have heard of information about Ray?"

"He's someone we Bandersnatch searched four corners of the earth to recruit as an agent. By the time we found out which prison he was incarcerated in, someone had already made a move on him."

"Ahh~ how unfortunate. I wonder who it was?"

Izabel shakes her shoulders sarcastically. Maria pays her no attention, and continues her talk.

"Our play will have to stop here for now."

"Are you perhaps afraid of losing, Maria-san?"

But of course, Maria isn't the kind of person to fall to trivial taunts such as that.

"A play is only a play when the audience is separated from the participants. If the two were to duel in this cramped space, this girl cannot foretell the consequences."

A valid reasoning.

Izabel does not deny Maria's statement; she nods approvingly in response.

"I suppose it is true."

It's only us that's going to be at unfavourable odds if we waste any more time here, seemed to be what Maria was thinking.

"In that case, this family meeting will draw to a close here."

As if the commotion from earlier was only a dream, Maria adds on in a dull voice.

"Those that are opposed, please raise your hand. Of course, I will not put your opinion into consideration."

It's somewhat of a witty ending to her sentence.

"W, wait right there! Letting Maria go like this?! I can't understand this at all!"

Rampaging around no clue as to how the situation was unfolding, Heimlich was the only one that disagreed with Maria.

"There's time for action, and there's time for biding and perseverance, Heimlich-kun."

Wiping her devilish smile from her face, Izabel was once again donning her serene smile to cuddle her brother.

"B, but!"

"I said I will not put your opinion into consideration."

"D, dammit! I'll make you regret for not choosing me someday!"

"Think however you like."

Whew, even I wouldn't get tricked with a feeble taunt like that. This guy really is an amateur. It makes me doubtful about the fact that he's a Blackhazel just like Maria just by thinking about it.

Silently, Maria turns around and leaves the conference room.

I hastily follow Maria in her exit, but I take the time to throw a glace behind me to the mess of a conference room that looked like it's been swarmed with hundred beagles let loose.

“Haha, what a disaster.”

Muttering away while clutching my nose, I sincerely hope that no one paid attention to what I was saying.

## V . Dorothy :: Please look at me (2)

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/001.

My life here has settled down to tranquility and quiet after the nerve-wrecking incident at the family meeting passed by.

Peace, I should say.

There's at least no chance of getting attacked by an armed assailant or having a shuriken thrown my way by a chakra-using killer ninja. None of those ridiculous plot twists for now.

However, I received a phone call from that place.



Turn of events never comes knocking beforehand.

Just when Maria was away, a worker in the Swiss information agency, medical department, happened to make a call.

“Mr. Siyoung of Blackhazel. I’ve heard stories about you.”

Her voice sounds cold and mechanical. I wouldn’t be surprised if she was an office worker straightening her glasses on the other end of the phone.

“Ah, yes, what are you calling about?”

“Well, it’s about Dorothy-san’s medical checkup from a while ago.”

“Medical checkup?”

Ahh, I guess it’s about that not-really-important checkup she had from a while back.

“It’s not a huge problem. But... we found some signs of lung adenocarcinoma, and we decided to notify you beforehand for precaution purposes.”

“Lung adenocarcinom...a?”

I'm still a student, so I don't know any hard word like that.

But when I think about it, I doubt they would go through the trouble to make a phone call if this was something trivial like catching a flu or something like that.

"We believe it could be a tumor of some kind."

"W-wait a second... Tumor... you say?"

Wait a minute, what's with this nonsense.

"There is no need to worry. It's a biological phenomenon that occurs commonly to decayed cells, so as long as we take the proper precaution beforehand..."

"Um, excuse me, but what do you mean by decayed cells?"

That reminds me, they were talking about 'decayed blood' or something like that at the family meeting before.

Maybe they were referring to Dorothy?

"Could it be that you haven't been informed yet?"

A tone of surprise is felt on the other end of the line. No, what is she talking about. Is she trying to tell me that Dorothy is some kind of a transgender or something?

There's no way that's possible.

That's way too much of an unexpected development.

"Has Miss Maria not informed you yet?"

"Well, all this about a decaying something and all that, I'm not... Ah? Er, hang on a second."

While I was busy on the phone, I spotted Dorothy coming out of her room to do something. I gesture her over to the phone.

"Yo, Dorothy! There's a call from the Swedish hospital or something like th- Fueh?!"

"G-get off the phone, you idiot!"

She gets angry in an instant and knocks me aside to answer the phone in haste.

Oy, oy, if you really hate me that much, then just tell me. Don't just act it out. I was going to pass the phone over to you anyway.

"Um, is this Doctor Anna?"

I could sense a pitch of anxiety from the way her voice shook as she answered the phone.

But.

If there's nothing wrong with my ears, then I swear I heard something like 'tumor' from before. Could this be something really serious?

"That idiot doesn't know anything! It's something even Maria-onee-sama agreed with! So please don't go around mentioning 'that' so carelessly!"

If you're talking about the tumor, I already heard about it.

Could it be that she was afraid of saying goodbye to me, so she developed this cold attitude of hers to keep me away and hid how she really was... Nah, something as simple as that can't possibly be true.

"I'm fine with something like that! I know I'm the best at knowing what's wrong with my own body! But do you understand me!? You have to keep it in mind! I won't let anyone, not even you Doctor Anna, just go around about 'that'!"

And so, it was a moment when Dorothy's attraction points skyrocketed.

"Yes, yes, then please do so. I'm always in your debt. I'll take the treatment at a suitable time."

With her usual one-way conversation in tow, Dorothy puts the receiver down.

I break in tears, stuttering for words, overwhelmed by my pity for Dorothy

"Ahhh, my poor miserable little sister, second to none in this world!"

"Wh-what? What's with you?"

“Knowing that you didn’t have much to live because of the tumor, you decided to voluntarily distance yourself from your Onii-san, in fear of getting too attached emotionally!”

As I told my tale of deepest misery to tear any eyes and pain any heart listening to it, I expected the antagonism I have built up with Dorothy to melt down in an instant like snow in spring. And at that exact moment-

“I told you to stop watching soap operas, you idiot!”

A fierce punch flew my way, and my fluttering heroin-like conscience was returned back to reality.



And on that evening.

After the meal is finished, I return back to my room with a game console that was stocked in the house. From what I heard, it was given by a company working under a gaming software developer free of charge, to test out their newest product.

And it’s not like there’s anyone in this dignified mansion that would actually take the time to play on a video game console.

Somehow I can’t imagine Maria moving her character here and there busily to get healing potions. Maybe I could Imagine Dorothy doing that easily enough, strangely.

Looking through the various game titles, I pick out a game that looks the most familiar to me, and insert it inside the console.

If you never heard of Tekken series all your life, then I’d have no choice but to brand you as an alien spy from another planet. This sequel number in front of the game seems a bit foreign to me, though.

“Hey, Lily. You know how to play games?”

There’s no way I could possibly have fun fighting against computers with their lacking AI. No matter what, fighting games were meant to be played against someone else.

\*Shake shake\*

Lily shines her eyes in curiosity at the fighting game I held in my hand. I think this match-up is going to be pretty interesting.

You're looking at someone who used to dominate the arcades in the fighting game genre when he was young. There's no way someone of your caliber could ever have a chance against me.

We eventually ignite off somehow and choose a character for ourselves. And so, it's round one start.

"You do this and this, ah, hmm, then like that, ohhh! Yep, just like that!"

I nail down a brilliant combo, connecting it with a low-mid fake wall combo to hit it off.

"Uuu."

It's to be expected, but I leave Lily enraged, who was hit by defeat harder than a Greyhound bus traveling at full speed.

The fruit of victory is sweet, my friend.

So what if it was against a twelve-year-old girl or a three-year old toddler, a win is a win.

"You just can't compare this feeling of playing around with newbs in a game to anything else."

Following that was another victory for me, giving me two consecutive wins in the 'three win victor' rule system the match was set in.

"Hauu."

I can tell what she's feeling, it's easy with the childish way she thinks.

I swear I'll use the opportunity to get back at Lily for all the times she had me tricked and mocked before.

A principle of warriors; not fighting against unarmed civilians, comes to my mind

briefly, but it's fine with me. In the end, a win is a win. Especially in a video game.

—.

And after my undisputed domination at the very beginning, a small ripple of change in the game took place at the third round, right after the timer started.

I say a small ripple, because all she's managed to do was simple learning to guard some of my attacks.

Aerial attacks are stopped by a mid guard. Mid guard is stopped by a low attack.

Middle attacks are stopped by low and mid guard. Aerial attacks go through low guard.

She's only learned the basic foundation of fighting games just now.

I hardly think it'll be enough to change the flow of this match but...

"Huh, it changed."

Aw crap, I forgot that this kid has a genius level of reflex at a professional level!

She doesn't know any combos, but she's guarding away all of my attacks to nab counters at me with basic attacks to slowly chip away at my HP.

"Fufu."

I start to sweat at the unexpected turn of events.

With just a few matches' worth of data she's beating me, who once managed to beat a local champion 30 times in a row. Consequently, he decided to try out real-life Tekken at me in frustration afterward. I'm losing this bad to a newbie of this level.

The pressure I'm feeling right now is no joke.

And so, the situation escalates into three wins under my belt and two under hers.

If I lose this round as well, then it'll become three for the both us, evening out the score.

But Lily's absorbing every bit of knowledge like a sponge, starting from the combos I used to all sorts of feint skills. She really isn't normal at this. Gaming reflex, I should say? In any case, her reflex transcends that of a normal person!

The match score was about to set even, with three wins for Lily.

It's time I brought out my ultimate card about now.

Yes.

That is-

"It's getting late. We should stop here for today."

I quickly sprint forward and click on the reset button.

"Hauu!"

Comrades, have you heard of Alt+F4? It's a word of profession to those that work on this side. In translation, it means to win and run way. In essence, since I ended the game right 'before' the score was about to progress from 3 to 2 into 3 to 3, it technically makes me the victor.

Yes.

It's even in the Art of Wars. Winning a war is better than winning a battle.

I suppose it a bit different in this situation, but it doesn't really matter.

"Uuu, you, cowar..."

I enjoy the victor's leisure at my convenience, while I ignore Lily glaring this way in vengeance, blazing with contempt.



Though "it's getting late" was only a technicality I came up with, but really in reality, the grandfather clock in the mansion was already pointing away at one.

The mansion at night feels stifling with silence like a graveyard indeed, with not even a late-night halogen lamp lighting the way. It reminds me of a haunted house.

No, a cheap amusement park-scale haunted house filled with disappointing antic can't compare to this. The mansion is hundred times scarier. That much I can say for certain.

"Ah, ahh..."

\*Flinch\*

And just then, did I imagine the groaning sound that sounded like a ghost lamenting at a graveyard?

"Hahnn..."

Nope, I'm not imagining.

"W-wait a sec, what is this now!? You're kidding me!?"

You're actually trying to tell me there really is a ghost in the mansion?

Whatever the case, I've only lived for only 18 years. I'm not even that plump and I certainly don't look that appetizing at all. I'm not gonna pay for your medical bills if you get a stomachache eating me.

And most importantly, I'm still a virgin.

Wait, hang on.

Logically speaking, something like ghosts doesn't exist. And I'm not one of those neo-science cultist idiots around nowadays either.

What's important is that this sound is coming from Dorothy's room.

Yes.

If it's coming from Dorothy's room- If we assume so.

"Maybe's she's feeling unwell?"

I think back on what the person from the Swedish medical something-or-the-other said to me over the phone. If my ears were working correct, it was certainly something about a tumor. Even someone uneducated like I am know that tumor

isn't something you can just laugh through.

With that thought, I head to Dorothy's room with a rather foreboding mind.

"Ahhh, yes, Onee-sama...!"

And,

Shining through the gap on her door to my eyes,

"!"

Lies Dorothy with her white blouse torn half-open and her breasts exposed, posed in an erotic stance, teasing her nipples and crotch with her fingers.

Moan of lewd whispers could be heard from her half-clenched mouth.

"What. The."

Oh my lord.

My legs lose what strength they have left at this unexpected event before me. It's an awkward situation that I just can't make heads or tails out of.

'I like it there, Onee-sama... Maria-onee-sama...!"

And she's keeping calling out Maria's name, smiling.

Just what the hell's going on here?

The information is sufficient enough, for sure. But I just don't know how to process all of this inside my head.

It really is a needlessly awkward situation.

Could I just pretend that I haven't seen anything and just live the rest of my life normally? No, sitting here thinking about all this is one thing, but exactly why aren't I running away?

Ahhh, I don't know what to do.

What do you want me to do!?

Maybe this is a trial.

It's really driving me crazy. Really. What could possibly be the right thing to do at a time like this? What do I need to do to get through this correctly and live like nothing happened?

I'm anxious.

Like a wave of fire blazing along, my train of thought races through my brain racking for an idea.

Not like I expected my brain to suddenly throw me a perfect idea to do at times like this, but it was still something.

—\*Swipe\*

While I was buy busy still trailing my train of stupid thoughts, I accidentally, and I really mean accidentally, push back the door just by a smidgen of a millimeter with my elbow.

Holy shit!

Spitting out my exclamation of absolute horror, I know what is to come.

Maybe this is the time when I start preparing my will for the future generations.

I really wonder why the pause of time Dorothy takes to notice the door widening and my presence has to feel so long, geez.

I felt like if there was a hole somewhere, I'd surely have stuck my head inside and never come out until the end of time.

Of course, it's impossible for such convenient hole to be there, and if the door opens likes this, then I have to face Dorothy in the eyes, on the spot.

Just how will I manage through this awkwardness and uncomfortableness?

Every second, and every minutes are stretched out helplessly, like a strand of cheese being spread apart on Italian pizza.



“Huee...e?”

When the plaster-stiffened arrows on the clock started to tick yet once more,

Our gazes meet in midair, and weave together to form a tangled wad of ribbons.

Perhaps it was because the situation was too unexpected for her, but Dorothy did nothing but stay still on the spot, frozen with confusion. Likewise, the same could be applied to what I was doing.

“Ah, no, t-this is!”

Like an excuse would do any good now.

Everything's in shambles now. Ohhhh Buddha. Please take pity on me to save my life somehow. I don't care if you have to give me a lecture about how Buddhism isn't about salvation, just whatever it takes for me to get out of this mess.

Well, actually in that case, maybe it would have been better to have prayed to God instead.

...Goddamn it.

Whatever comes, comes.

I'm dead meat anyway. I could pray to every god in existence but it won't change the predetermined karma fate has set in store for me.

It really is horrifying to watch Dorothy put her clothes back on, straighten herself, and approach my way. I don't think I ever saw her like this.

Oh my.

I feel like wetting my pants right now.

I can feel her killing aura, similar to raging waves crashing against a lone cliff in a storm, blowing my way.

How much time had passed, I don't know. I feel like if I opened my eyes even for a

moment right now, I'd see angels draped in white with horns play fanfare around me.

Shouting something like 'Welcome to the heaven!' or something to that effect.

Ahhh, it's a future I don't want to imagine.

Think about the hundreds of possibilities of miserable future that I can choose from, I forcefully move my tongue to spit out a pitiful excuse as an explanation.

"Ahah!? So the guy Dorothy happens to like has the name Maria, it kinda sounds like a girl's name!? Ahah, ahahaha, hahaha... ha."

Just look at how pathetic I look, expecting an excuse as corny as this to possibly work at a time like this.

"Hic!"

She's hiccupping all of a sudden. To be more specific, she's letting something out inside here using her hiccups as a starting point.

"Hic... Hic! Huaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah-!!"

Ahhh, Romeo. Just what kind of explanation do you have towards this sudden reaction here?

Maybe a straightforward punch-out would have been better, Juliet.

"No, hey, Do-Dorothy...?"

"Hua, huaaaaaaaaah-! You're, hic! You're the b-bad... Hic! Bad one here! From start... Hic! Hic! Huaaaaaaaaah-!"

She's obviously half-crying, half-confessing to something here, but the problem is that I just can't understand what she's trying to say.

This really isn't good for me.

What should I even do with Dorothy here, crying away like a child in front of me?

If there was anything I could do to begin with, anyway.

It's not like I can just turn blind eye to this and retreat back to my room.

At that time, the best idea that came to my head was bow down in front of Dorothy and beg until my head was cracked to pieces.

"Sorry! It's all my fault! Everything is my fault! Sorry I was even born in to this world!"

Like a servant begging his king to spare his life, I beg away pitifully and humbly, again and again.

Maybe she's calmed down a bit. She's still sniffling, but she's stopped her crying outburst and beginning to say something.

"...Impossible."

\*Sniffle sniffle\* Tear-sodden Dorothy struggles to speak coherently, and continues on her sentence.

"What? What is it? Just go ahead and tell me!"

"Now that I've been seen like this, I can't remain by Onee-sama's side anymore!"

"Eh?"

"I'll kill myself and take you along with me, if it's come to this!"

And then, Dorothy takes a sharply edged fountain pen and proceeds to swing it my way!

"Uwaaah?!"

She was being serious about it?!

"S-someone help me!"

With the sound of gale grazing my ear, the sound of wind sounds deathly chill. This feeling of fear and pressure combining together everywhere in my body... I really don't like it.

"Die! Someone like you is better off dead!"

“So-sorry! I really didn’t mean to do it! To explain, I-“

I should’ve just stayed back there and kept on getting destroyed by Lily. 100 to 3 if it needed to be.

If I think about it, all this happened just because I wanted some meaningless sense of victory to myself.

Ahh, somebody please save me.

“—An opening!”

While I was busy thinking about those things, Dorothy, who was waiting for a moment of opportunity, throws the pen right at my direction.

Leaving a thin gash on my chin, the pen travels on leaves behind a hole on the wall behind me.

“Why... Won’t you just die!”

Take that stupid persistence to someone that actually wants to die!

Dorothy approaches my way, held within her a whirl rage and killing intent.

I stumble clumsily backward, until the wall behind me closes in and stops my escape.

Back to the wall.

So I really am going to die now.

I automatically flinch and close my eyes watching Dorothy jerk her hand back and prepare to swing it my way like a golf club. FuXX, getting hit by that is going to cost at least two ribs by default, with organ damage as a bonus option to boot, with plenty left to spare.

But.

The impact that follows is nothing more than a tap to my chest, nothing more than a gentle touch.

“Eh...?”

Confused, I cautiously open my eyes.

And there was Dorothy with her arm helplessly stretched and her head bowed down.

Dorothy continues on once more, fighting back her tears.

“Why are you trying to take Onee-sama away from me.”

‘Wh-what?’

“All I want is just to remain by Onee-sama’s side, and even that isn’t allowed for me?”

“I-I’m just...”

I hastily try to come up with a reply, but Dorothy swiftly cuts down on the rest of my sentence.

‘I don’t want to hear anything from you!’

Her emotions aren’t just in a normal level of agitation.

I expect anything I could say to her would sound twisted to her ears right now, I imagine.

My conclusion is that I should forget about my side of the story for now and retreat.

The situation I’m in is one with no escape, an absolute checkmate.

“W-well for now, let’s just calm down a bit, alright?”

“I don’t even want to you look at your face, so just beat it!

I don’t think I ever saw her this angry.

“Er, er.... Right. I’ll return to my room for now then, alright? Calm down a bit, and we can talk this through tomorrow, okay?

“If you have time to babble in front of me then get out of my sight!”

“O-kay! I got it! I’ll be off now!”

I walk backward to get out of Dorothy’s sight, and breathe down a sigh of relief out of her earshot to calm my nerves.

I really could have been killed back there.

On that token, I should be just thankful that I got out of there still breathing.

...Was what I was thinking.

That was the train of stupid thought that was circulating inside my head.

Back then, I never would have thought in my dreams that this would turn to one of the top 3 worst mistakes in my life.



“I can’t find Dorothy anywhere.”

That was Maria’s first word on the next day morning.

/002.

I was crying.

Like always, I was crying.

I can’t recall what I was crying for. Maybe I was scolded by one of the caretakers in the mansion, I accidentally broke one of my toys that I treasured, or perhaps I lost my precious doll that I always kept close by me.

“Please don’t cry, Dorothy.”

If it ever happened, I always had my older sister by my side.

Back then she was only a little girl stuck somewhere in childhood, but even back

then her eyes seemed to carry this enigmatic power that froze anybody she happened to looked at.

“There, there, you’re a good girl, right? Your sister will always be by Dorothy’s side.”

Like magic.

Just a word from my sister would stop my tears in an instant.

My wounds would stop hurting, people that disliked me would change their mind, and everything miserable would melt away like snow into nothingness.

My older sister could do anything.

Someone as amazing as her was always smiling by my side.

Someone that treasured me more than anyone else would.

These simple facts, to a younger me, would make me so happy, that it brought tears to my eyes—

—.

“Ah.”

Snapping back to reality, the cold embrace of the busy Brașov streets comes into my view. I’m sitting on a bench. I think I fell asleep when I decided to sit down for a while to rest a bit.

I get up hastily and made my mind to move somewhere else that was less crowded, away from everyone else’s attention.

With no particular aim set in mind, I wander through the streets, taking a glance at the shops by the side through the windows.

Why does the boundary between inside the shop and the outside world feel so solid? Why do those cheap trinkets inside the window, that’s probably worth nothing more than a few coins, feel so distant from me?

“I’m hungry.”

I mutter such words helplessly.

I want to go back.

To where my sister is. To the mansion where delicious meal, comfortable bed and relaxing sofa awaited me.

But it's too much for me to ask now.

There is not the place where I should be at.

\*—*Drip*. \*

Though I was unaware, a drop of water slips down.

It's not a teardrop.

「Plip plip.....」

The drops of water that fell on my head quickly turns into a torrential rainfall to batter down the ground. It's a rain shower.

People on the streets scramble in panic to find cover under the street banners, and for some lucky few, they open up their umbrella.

Only I'm left standing alone in the rain, separated from everyone, as I gaze hollowly into the void around me.

“...It's cold.”

But there's nowhere for me to go.

A wave of sorrow suddenly hits me. I feel like breaking down in tears where I'm standing and give up on everything there is in my life.

Even though I'm this much deep in anguish and trouble. Even though I'm screaming out for someone to look after me.

Why won't anyone stay by me?

Why won't you look after me like you used to before?

—Just when I was thinking such things.

A shadow descends on top of my head, and the platter of rain battering on my head cease.

An umbrella.

“Onii-sama...?”

I'm not sure what gave me such confidence that it was her.

I thought that there was no one else that would be caring enough towards me to do such a thing.

With that hope in mind, like a traveler dying of thirst in a desert spotting an oasis, I raised my head to...



“Onii-sama, just what kind of talk did you have with Dorothy the last time you saw her?”

Perhaps it was only natural? The situation is continuing to take a turn for the worse.

It's been exactly two days since Dorothy has run away.

Maria is beginning to realize the severity of this situation, and she dogs me for an answer with an unfitting persistence.

“W, who knows?”

It's driving me mad here.

Do I just come out with it or not?

If I did and Dorothy happened to come back, she could just as well be inclined to tear me to pieces when she hears what I've told them. It's possible. Since this much amount of misfortune just seems to be a part of my everyday life.

“Er, well the thing is, that...”

So in the end, I have no choice but to avoid the minefield and try to put things in a nice perspective. Not that I’m sure this is the best thing to do.

“You could say that we had a small quarrel.”

“Quarrel, you say?”

“I don’t think that girl understands the position I have in this house.”

I don’t know if I have enough position in this house to even talk about the issue of having a place or not, but the point I’m making isn’t a wrong one in a sense.

“That’s to say, it felt like there were two suns in the sky.”

An anecdote of critical validity, compared to none in the world.

“I know you’re vaguely aware of it. How Dorothy’s really unhappy with me being here.”

“Then, does Onii-sama not feel the same way about Dorothy?”

“...Whatever.”

To be honest, I can’t say I’m that fond of someone who tries to make my life a living hell.

“But family is still family.”

I’m not talking about a simple relation. And it certainly isn’t about whether we like each other or not. Going beyond all that, it’s about something that makes family ‘family’, something that can’t be defined nor categorized.

“In that case, Onii-sama...”

“Hmm?”

“Let’s say that...”

In a slightly wavering tone, Maria speaks:

“Dorothy isn’t Onii-sama’s sister. What would you do then?”

“What are you talking about?”

We’re not related?

Hold up there, you idiot. You and Dorothy look the same like a pair of taiyaki. Except maybe those heterochromatic eyes, but that’s a genetic mutation to begin with, anyway. I wouldn’t say you guys don’t look alike just because your eyes are different.

“You guys are twins. Identical ones at that.”

“That is not what I’m asking. Looking past the relation and responsibilities, Onii-sama, I’m asking what you think of a girl named Dorothy.”

“Why are you asking something like that?”

Are you trying to tell me that this situation is a lot graver than I think it is?

“...You’re getting me worried all of a sudden.”

Watching me say something like that while scratching my head awkwardly, Maria puts on a dry smile and apologizes.

“I am sorry if I had you worried.”

But we’re talking about her one-and-only sister running away from the house. Even for Maria, aren’t they both sisters? Though one’s called older just because of a few second difference.

“But it’s because there was something worrisome on my mind.”

“Worrisome?”

“Yes. For my convenience, I am using the Bendersnatch Information Taskforce to locate the whereabouts of Dorothy, but...”

“But?”

“I can’t find her.”

*\*Thud\**

With Maria's words, my already lead-like heart sinks further down my chest.

I can see where Maria is coming with this.

Yes.

This situation really, really did take a turn for the worse.



“Oiii~.”

Me and Maria spent the next day in a state of extreme nervousness, when an unexpected visitor came by with an unexpected punch line the next morning. It's been exactly three days since Dorothy has run away.

Spewing unnecessary engines noises in front of the mansion is nothing other than a brand-new Lamborghini Aventador.

The handsome man decked in a suit and sunglasses that emerges from the car is none other than Heimlich, who I had run into at the family meeting earlier.

“Well, look who it is! It's that famous Onii-sama who does nothing but leech off the master of the Blackhazel family like a parasite that he is.”

“Oh? Look at you acting so high and mighty now.”

That smirking face of his remains obnoxious as usual. I can still picture him whining away in front of his sister and Maria like it happened just yesterday.

“What is it that you need, Heimlich?”

Maria, just coming out of the house now to meet our unexpected guest, remarks back coldly to him, as if to say that Heimlich will not be admitted even a step inside the mansion.

“Ahh, it's nothing too major. I just thought that you should take this opportunity to say hi to your new soon-to-be brother-in-law.”

“What?”

This guy, I hope he didn’t eat something bad and got himself food poisoning that’s affecting his head or something.

When I was deep in such thoughts looking at Heimlich, I notice that there seems to be a strange leash of sort coiled in his right hand.

A leash?

“Here, here, hurry up and come out, you damn bitch!”

With a rough tug of his hand, what forcefully emerges in front of us is none other than.

“W, what the h—”

It’s Dorothy.

With a lock buckle, the type you’d only use on a pet, locked tightly around her neck connected to a leash, as if she was only an animal being domesticated.

For some reason, I can’t sense any resistance or defiance from her, and she’s doing nothing but stare into empty space, her dispirited eyes mirroring nothing in return.

“W, what’s this guy planning...!”

In just a moment, I’m charging straight at Heimlich with all I have, my minds blanked out by anger and rage.

Stepping in front of me to stop what I’m doing is none other than Maria.

“Stop, Onii-sama.”

“You, do you now see what that guy’s doing right now...!”

When I was about to raise my voice in response to Maria’s unfathomable actions, I nonchalantly notice Maria’s hands she curled up into a fist.

Blood was dripping down from her hands where her fingernails dug into her palm.



"You...!"

"Keep your composure, Onii-sama."

"Yeah yeah! When it comes to treating the ladies, I'm a gentleman that has women's best interest at heart. I'm not some pervert that likes fastening leashes on some bitch that doesn't want to be in one!"

"You, so you're saying that Dorothy is wearing that leash because she wants to?"

In response to my burst of anger, Heimlich replies back, adding on his exaggerated shoulder shake.

"Of course! Look, she's enjoying all this, really."

Cackling loudly, Heimlich forcibly tugs on the leash.

With that, Dorothy is dragged closer with Heimlich's weight on the leash, losing her balance and trailing on the ground like an animal.

She's gasping for breath and claws at her leash in agony.

"Heimlich."

But Maria doesn't panic.

Even though she's gripping so hard that there's blood trailing from her hands. Even though her only sister is being dragged around like someone less than an animal by that bastard.

She does nothing but maintain her icy stance wrapped in wintery antagonism, and calmly asks for an explanation.

"Remember that depending on Dorothy's answer, your life can be forfeited in place of a punishment, or that opposite might be in place."

Ahhh,

If I had my ways, I'd want nothing more than to run right to him and beat this bastard's face to a bloody pulp.

But if that is so, then why am I standing here, biting back my patience?

It's because we need an answer.

"Answer if you can, Dorothy. What you're doing right now, is it of your own free will?"

You just need to say one word.

Just say 'help'.

To beat this bastard until he dies.

"Yes."

"Is that so?"

"Wha...?"

But what comes back in return is nothing but an unexpected answer.

This girl, what did she just say?

You're really trying to say this pitiful state you're in right now is because of your own free will?

The times when you stomped over me like you were the best, the times when you flaunted the Blackhazel name you held so proudly, what happened to the façade you used you have? Where did it go?

"She's only saying that right now because she's scared out of her mind! I'll just beat this bastard until he's half-dead and free Dorothy right after!"

I can't stand still anymore.

Shaking my fists in anger, I approach to step forward once. As I do so, Dorothy's empty eyes that seemed to be set on nothing shakes slightly. Her swollen lips open cautiously.

"...I'm fine."

What.

“... I’m fine, so stop.”

“What are you talking about!?”

“Because I’m...”

The words her small lips spoke powerlessly, I couldn’t understand right away.

“I’m, master’s dog.”

“Kuk, kuhahahahahahaha!”

Heimlich loses himself in laughter.

Maria does nothing but carefully observe the situation, coldly calculating inside her head.

As for me, I fall into a feeling of endless delusion that felt distant from everything like a sunset would.

“I’ll ask you again, Dorothy.”

—Why?

“Why?”

“This idiot, what are you talking about?”

—Why?

“...There’s no other way.”

“Hmph, looks like you don’t have the brainpower to even talk properly.”

Taking the time to scoff at me repeating the same thing, Heimlich pulls on the leash again and drags Dorothy back inside the car.

Me and Maria can’t do anything. We couldn’t do anything.

We could only watch.

“Then, why?”

I stood around and mumbled such things to myself, as I watched Heimlich’s Lamborghini speed away on the road in front of the mansion and disappear through the horizon.

I’m not asking for the ‘reason’ as to why there can’t be any other way.

Yes.

I’m asking, for someone like you saying such thing, why you are—

**/003.**

“Onee-sama...?”

A shadow appears over my head and the pouring rain ceases to fall down.

An umbrella.

“It looks as though you’re lost, little miss abandoned kitten?”

With that, an odd woman with red hair comes into view, staring down at me.

It’s not Onee-sama.

“Why.”

What flashes though Dorothy’s face is only a self-mocking despair, along with the explicable sadness she had towards reality.

“Why, aren’t you my Onee-sama?”

The red-haired woman laughs at Dorothy’s murmuring which symbolized nothing more than the vain hopes she had.

“Hmm~? That’s because Maria-san isn’t coming.”

“Not... coming?”

"Yes. But speaking of that, wasn't Dorothy-san a 'little abandoned kitten' before?"

How does this woman know my name? Well, now that it's come to this, I won't worry about something as trivial as that. I don't care.

"Little, abandoned kitten?"

"Yes, you've been abandoned. It's probably because Dorothy-san isn't a Blackhazel or anything. Something like an old toy that's grown boring to play with; wouldn't it make more sense to throw something like that away?"

"I'm not a toy! I'm Maria-onee-sama's little sister, Dorothy Ivalice—"

*Cackle cackle.* In response to Dorothy's almost pitiful response, the red-haired woman laughs in amusement.

"Don't delude yourself. Dorothy-san is not a Blackhazel."

"Uu...!"

"Maybe Maria-san calls you a Blackhazel for the sake of this game of house she's playing; surely I don't think Maria-san remotely considered you a 'real Blackhazel'?"

No, Onee-sama is different!

The red-haired woman cuts across Dorothy's rebuttal and continues on her lecture.

"As proof, did Maria-san ever bring you along for any of the family meetings she attended? She even let that 'half-blood' come along with her!"

Dorothy's desperate cry scatters to pieces in her throat.

Stifling sense overwhelms her.

An illusion of falling into a trench of despair, deeper and darker than anything else in the world.

Yes.

The red-haired woman's words become a sharp blade to dig into Dorothy's chest.

I could be called Blackhazel all I want, but I can never become one in the end. I'm only a fake, a ready-made at best; it's because I'm only tool to be used.

The last spark of hope she had inside her heart disappears into nothing.

"But, there is still one way."

"Eh...?"

Atop the extinguished spark comes the glowing ember of temptation. That which feeds on despair and blazes with intensity.

"Yes, there is one way for Dorothy-san to become a 'real Blackhazel', that one way...♡"



"Most likely, there was a trade of seeds."

Maria starts the conversation with an unexpected beginning, in the Blackhazel mansion living room.

"A trade?"

Looking up in response to Maria's unexpected choice of words, I stare at her. As expected of her, Maria has already figured out what's been going on?

"It's because that child doesn't think of this place as somewhere she should be at."

My heart sinks.

"Somewhere... she should be at."

Why didn't I realize something obvious like that way before?

Dorothy herself had her own share of pain. The pain she felt when the place she thought she was entitled to was taken from her by my sudden appearance.

The place she should be at.

Her only respite.

「All I want is just to remain by Onee-sama's side.」

It's because I took that away from her.

“It’s my fault.”

I was too carefree.

“I made her like that.”

I was stupid.

“Don’t beat yourself up. Grieving like that will accomplish nothing but falling right into their hands.”

“Into their hands...?”

“You must maintain your true self, Onii-sama. This is, ultimately, only a trap to shake us, using Dorothy’s weakness as bait.”

She knew everything.

Her twin-colored gaze had already figured out their dark schemes and their shallow tricks, right from the beginning.

“Then why can’t we go rescue Dorothy right now?”

But, that’s exactly why I can’t understand her.

“Whatever the truth dictates, the situation is that this is packaged as what Dorothy did of her free will, even if it’s only a formality.”

“What?”

“Unless we have a reason to convince the rest of the Blackhazel family with, we cannot interfere with her choice here.”

“Reason, you say...?”

Mutely continuing on her sentence, I don’t even have the effort and energy to

contradict Maria's calm pokerface.

"I am the master of the Blackhazel family. No matter how much I despise the rest of the Blackhazel, I cannot openly go against my own family and single them out as my enemies."

"You can't go against them?"

"Yes."

Those bastards treated her only little sister like some farm animal, much less as a human being, and still she can't 'go against them'?

Just because they're part of the family?

"In that case, then are you trying to say that bringing me here was also because 'the family' wanted you to?"

"In their position, no matter how unreasonable I try to be, they have no choice but to follow though my decision as the family master. It's because that's the unanimous agreement the master and the members have agreed on."

You, what kind of gibberish are you talking about now?

"Then, if you try to be unreasonable again and bring Dorothy back, then they'll have no choice but to follow through with your decision!"

"That is impossible. I have already exceed the limit of unreasonable I could act as the master of Blackhazel."

'What are you talking about?"

"If I try to force my will onto them anymore, then the hierarchy of family we have established will crumble away."

Hierarchy of family.

At that point, I realized the point of what this philosophical and complicated story was about.

They could hate and disapprove on each other all they wanted, but they couldn't

go against the basic shell of hierarchy that was laid out onto them.

Maria loathes her family members, but she doesn't deny the fact they're still a part of the family.

As it is with the members; they don't like the fact that Maria is the family master, but they have no choice but to comply with her orders as long as she's the master.

That is the reason: no, the source of power, as to how the Blackhazel family maintains its structure amidst the blood-stained conflicts and oppositions that whirls around them.

"And that child was more or less, kicked out from this mansion because of you, Onii-sama."

"!"

"The truth can be whatever it wants it to be, but that was what that child was thinking before."

So Maria knew about what happened before.

Not only that, she was unknowingly aware of the problems Dorothy started to have because of my place here in the mansion.

"It's because of me."

"Yes. But as the same time, all this happened because of that child's choice."

"What?"

"Whether that choice is a meaningless misfortune she called upon herself as sacrifice or not – Even then, I still respect the choices she has made for herself."

You say you respect her choice.

"Let me ask you one more thing."

"Ask away."

"In other words, you're saying that you won't save Dorothy?"

“I am merely approaching this problem as logically as I can possibly be.”

“How can you even decide on something heartless like that?”

That girl’s your only little sister you have.

She only longs to stay be your side, as she has until now, and until the end of time; that’s the type of poor, delicate girl she is.

How can you ever snip away someone like her?

“That’s—”

In response to my question, the《Princess of Pure Darkness》emotionlessly replies back, colder and more merciless than she have ever sounded:

“That is – the way of the Blackhazel.”

## VI. Maria & Dorothy :: Because we are a family

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/001.

In an area about 500 meters away from the Newark Liberty International Airport.

*"Hello man, my name is Nakamura, I'm Japanese. Are you okay?"*

*"What the...."*

*"Sumimasen."*

*\*Wham!\**

Oh geez, I'm sorry about that. I know assaulting you from behind and stealing your motorcycle is not the most moral thing to do but there's no other way for me here. I really had no choice.

...

Yes.

Along with Lily, we knocked out an innocent passerby from behind. From then, we took him to a nearby deserted park, left him in the bathroom and took his motorcycle. No matter how anybody sees it, this is an organized two-man crime at its finest.

But what can I do about it?

There's a reason why I'm acting like the protagonist fatefully thrust into wrongdoing in some hero drama series.

Even though I'm aware as to how ridiculous it must sound to just suddenly buy a plane ticket and fly over the Pacific Ocean to get to New York where that person was located in.

「#19 Wall Street, Penthouse in J.P. Morgan Building.」

Well, whatever. It's a good chance for me to see Lily in action as the ultimate agent the Bandersnatch multi-purpose elite taskforce has to offer.

Starting from passport preparation, airport schedules, to the location Heimlich was in, I never expected her to find out and catch on to everything so quickly.

With that thought in mind, I seat Lily to the front and get on the motorcycle. Hmm, but the only experience I have with motorcycle is an old EXIF 125cc I used to ride during newspaper deliveries.

From the looks of it, this motorcycle I'm on is a Kawasaki Ninja 10R!

It really does make me feel pressured.

And I don't even have a license yet, is this really fine?

Though it's not like we can walk over to Wall Street by foot, and if we tried hitchhiking in this suspicious outfit we're in, the only place we'd be going to would be the police station.

So, like I said, we had no choice.

And if, by some chance, the owner of the motorcycle from back then is reading this, please see it in your benevolent mind and come to an understanding.

We didn't mean to.



"I didn't think he'd really come."

Looking down at the wall of skyscrapers decorating the city, Heimlich slowly opens his mouth.

"Considering it's only a simple entertainment, things are progressing way too smoothly. As expected, Isabel-onee-chan really is amazing."

"Kuku. Well, maybe I was just lucky~?"

Behind Heimlich. On the buffalo-leather sofa in the guest room. Sitting there, lazily sipping wine is no one other than a crimson-haired woman, Isabel.

"I really wouldn't have imagined in my dreams for that idiot to come chase us all the way over here for some useless bitch. Although I'm not sure how he found out

our location."

Heimlich mutters, as if curious.

"From what I heard, some agent from Ladies in Black decided to tag along with him."

"Hmm, are you scared by any chance?"

Heimlich pays no attention to Isabel nonchalantly shaking her shoulders at him.

"Never. This is my territory he's in."

Failure was impossible.

Those insects are only a moth diving headfirst into a fire; that's the kind of existence they were.

"This is why those low-bloods will always be stuck in the bottom."

Rather than cool logic, they force their emotions and passion first. Infinitely stupid, and foolish beyond belief. Their one-dimensional, overly simplistic, and flat personality bring tear to my eyes when I think about it.

That's the kind of people they were.

And Heimlich was different.

Heimlich was always the one to stare down at other atop the hierarchy's pyramid. In competition with others, he was always the one to take from and triumph over others, and to those who gave him humility, he always rewarded them back with hundred times the humility he received.

And in that life of his, this bastard by the name of Siyoung gave him a wound that no one else was able to inflict onto him before.

Yes.

"Maria."

A woman fit for someone like Heimlich, someone atop the summit of this world. A

woman that only he could have, and someone that was worth his while.

Someone like her, he took her away.

It's a humiliation beyond imagination.

That's why retribution was in order.

Humiliation times hundred, thousands.

No, even if it has to be hundreds of thousands times.



“Oi, used goods.”

Dorothy doesn't answer. She does nothing but sit on the bed with her head shaken down, helplessly staring out the window to gaze at the vast, open, moonless sky.

Perhaps Dorothy's lack of response has come across to Heimlich as ignorance and irked him somehow; he pulls strongly on the leash wrapped around his hand.

“You stupid bitch, say something when your master calls you!”

“U, ah.... u! I'm sorry...!”

Dorothy moans in pain, and begs for forgiveness.

“Hmph. Well, whatever. It'd be too boring if you acted obedient every time, anyway.”

Heimlich laughs to himself, clearly entertained by something.

“Even if you're only a substitute for Maria with no use for anything besides your body.”

“Uuu-”

Hearing that, Dorothy bites her lip in anger. Though her clenched teeth, her lip rips and blood drips down below her.

“The promise, you’ll keep it?”

“Ahh, of course. Even if it’s for someone useless and good-for-nothing like you, I’m someone special that can give you the ‘Blackhazel name’ you want so much.”

“...Yes.”

Dorothy nods in submission, wordlessly agreeing with him.

For her, something like defiance no longer exists.

‘There’s no other way but this.’

There’s no place for someone like me to return.

‘That’s why, there’s no other way.’

This digesting and nauseating piece of scum before my eyes has Blackhazel’s name.

He has the same blood as Onee-sama.

That why, even if I had to go through something pitiful and cruel as this, even if I have to bow down before this man as his slave...

If I can take someone with the name Blackhazel as **my husband** and take that name for myself...

I’ll be able to stay beside Onee-sama as a “real Blackhazel” in any way possible.

I’ll be able to look at Onee-sama, even if she was at somewhere far and unreachable.

‘That’s why, there’s no other way.’



Onee-sama always had an expression of happiness everytime she talked about her Onii-sama.

To be honest, when she said someone else was going to join out family I felt a slight pang of jealousy, but on the other hand I couldn’t help but feel a little

hopeful.

Just who is this person to excite Onee-sama with bliss just by imagining about him?

What kind of person could this new ‘Onii-sama’ be like to the two of us?

But, our long-awaited first encounter with Onii-sama was as horrible as it can be, so much I don’t want to even think about it once now.

If you asked me whether as to it improved from there, then the answer would still be negative.

Elegance and manners seemed to elude him, and he was nothing but useless in everything.

All in all, I felt pretty betrayed.

But what infuriated me beyond what my patience could handle was that Onee-sama’s attention was always directed toward him.

Before he came, the spot beside Onee-sama was always reserved only for me.

The smile Onee-sama used to have always belonged to only me.

In the end, I was only a selfish child that wanted to act spoiled as I liked.

Just because I was afraid of no longer being next to Onee-sama. Because I was afraid of losing the only home I had. Because I was wrapped on this childish emotion called ‘jealously’ I had.

That’s why I tortured him so, and I never showed him a genuine smile. Even if we were siblings, I never talked to him with the familiarity a sibling would exchange each other with. No, I never tried to.

Because I was a bad girl.

Because I’m a ‘fake’ that can’t ever become a Blackhazel.

There’s no way a Prince Charming on a white horse or a miracle would come all this way to save a ‘fake’ like me; something convenient like that doesn’t exist in this world.

Miracles are miracles; because they don't happen.

Yes.

That much I know.

That is why this is my 'punishment'.

A punishment given to me because I'm a bad girl that tortured my brother for no reason.

A punishment given for a mere fake to be attempting to take the place of someone 'real' and stupidly dreaming of a dream lasting hundred days.

It's my last selfish request, as I bless the two of them on their happiness, as I drift away from them further and further.



**-And then, a miracle happened.**

"It's-a-me."

That person who was so devoid of elegance and manners and was useless in everything.

That person who couldn't even arrive on a common pony, much less a white horse.

"Open up there, I say."

That 'Onii-sama', was before me.

**/002.**

Putting Lily behind my back and heading into one of the doors in the penthouse, was a guest room of sort greeting me.

The first thing that greeted me was Heimlich haughtily leering at my way.

Grasped in his hand was a leash that was connected to Dorothy lying on the bed.

It really is a nauseating sight, I thought subconsciously.

“I’m here to take you back, Dorothy.”

“!”

“Let’s go back home, Maria’s waiting for us.”

\**Throb*\*

As I mentioned Maria’s name, I didn’t fail to notice Dorothy’s short flinch, as if she’d felt something emerge from her heart.

No, I couldn’t have failed to notice something like that.

“Hmph, don’t make me laugh.”

Even despite all that, Dorothy shot back my way with an icy cold glare, signalling her disapproval.

“You stole my sister from me, and now you’re talking about ‘going back’ now? ‘Home’, you say...?”

Her words sounded like a desperate man’s jeer, giving up on everything in the world.

“You took everything I had away from me! Where I was supposed to be and my precious sister! And you have the guts to come now, and talk about ‘going back home’?! Someone like you is better off out of my sight!”

Heimlich, who was busy cackling at Dorothy sobbing sorrowfully, joins in the conversation.

“I’m sorry but this girl is mine now! There’s no place for someone like you to butt in between now.”

“Shut up, you.”

“What?”

“Gone deaf? Just sit there like a good boy and shut up.”

“Haa, look at this little monkey strutting around...”

Perhaps Heimlich was disturbed that he couldn’t casually watch the quarrel between me and Dorothy; his face contorts its shape in rage, in response to my taunts.

“W-Wait a second! He’s nothing but air! Swagging around shooting off his empty threats is all this person can do! Just let him go back like this!”

-.

“Wait.”

Towards Dorothy hiding behind her façade, telling me there really is nothing wrong, I suppress my emotions to the very minimum and flatly continue on my words.

“Are you really sure you won’t come to regret this decision you’ve made?”

“Yeah.”

「But that’s not the place I should be at anymore.」

“I regret nothing.”

「That is why this is my ‘punishment’.」

“I see. Is that so?”

Gazing into Dorothy’s teeth-clenched face of determination face to face, I think back on the unfinished question I’ve asked from back then.

“If that’s what you really think, then let me just ask you one thing. **Why?**”

“W-What do you mean?”

I’m not asking for the ‘reason’ as to why there can’t be any other way.

Yes.

“I’m just curious.”

「I’m asking, for someone like you saying such thing, why you-.」

“I’m just curious as to why someone like you, with not even a shred of regret in her mind, is **shedding tears** before me – I want to hear a proper answer to that! Dorothy Ivalice Blackhazel!”

Ah.

“Ahhh...!”

At those words.

At that moment, the lock located deep within Dorothy’s heart opens widely.

The sealed letter inside her heart rips open.



That stupid brother, the same brother I was so adamant on rejecting, smiles and extends his hands this way.

Because he wanted to “take me back.”

“Ha-hauu...!”

The something clotted inside my heart comes close to breaking down. The sorrow I’ve welled up inside me comes crashing down like water pouring out of a collapsed dam.

“Stupid...! Stupid, stupid, you stupid idiot Onii-san...! Why, for some like me, why did you...!”

“Why did I come to save you?”

“Everything turned out like this, because of you!”

“Of course, it is my fault.”

I've no thought of denying that.

It's my fault. It's because it's my fault.

"And, you're talking about 'taking me back' now?! Then what happens to the decision I've made? What's going to happen to my resolve?"

"It's because of that I've come to take you back, isn't it?"

"If you're acting like that, then who am I supposed to hate...!"

Looking at the sobbing Dorothy, I confirm inside my heart.

She's not isolating herself.

She's not giving up.

Right now is when she needs an answer. The answer that will fill the void inside her heart. The answer that will save her from this despair.

"If you're just looking for someone to hate, then that fella over there with 'I'm the bad guy' tattooed on his forehead will do, so that's not a problem."

"Wh-what?!"

"Next is about your determination and resolve... Well, to be frank, I don't think I'm the one that can give you the answer to that."

I couldn't understand from the beginning.

Why are you wasting your effort trying pin down people here and there for every little thing?

I knew.

I knew from the beginning the answer to that stupid question.

What you truly needed was not some justification to the decision you've made for yourself.

“But.”

No, it's exactly because of that I can say this right now. I can answer you.

“Aren't we a family?”

It's because we're a family.

This isn't the place you're supposed to be at right now.

Yes, the place for Dorothy Ivalice Blackhazel is still there.

That's why I've come here to take you back to where you're really supposed to be.

“What else could you possibly need then?”

“Stop acting like you're some retarded big-shot, you little shit!”

And it was then.

*\*-Bang!\**

All of a sudden, a gunshot reverberated throughout.

Not towards bottom of the wide-open night sky, but towards my chest instead.

“Eh....h?”

The one responsible for the gunshot is none other than Heimlich who could do nothing but stand by and listen to our conversation.

“You retarded bitch, it's like all this pointless drama is affecting your head or something.”

He spits out incoherent profanity and insults, huffing and puffing with rage.

“Wh-what did you...?”

“What do you think I did? I gave your damn brother another hole to breathe through!”

Unable to contain his anger, he violently pulls on the leash in a contorted expression.

“Kuh, ahuu...!”

“What? Family? Where you’re supposed to be? What a load of bullshit!”

Heimlich marches toward me in anger and stomps down furiously on my fallen body like he was possessed. It’s as if he transformed into a madman, drunk on impulse and losing himself in the moment.

“S-Stop!”

“You shut up!”

\*Wham!\*

Did he not realize he was up against a girl? With no hesitation, he slams down on Dorothy’s face with full force of his anger.

“I think you’re mistaking yourself as some hero from Marvel here? Whatever hero illusion you have, there’s no Superman in this world! Nor is there Batman! Same with Spiderman! Do you finally understand now, you rubbish loser?

In the end, he gets tired from his own rampage and squats down right in front of me, still gasping for breath.

“What, you’re still alive?”

Heimlich pulls on my hair, laughing as if he’s exasperated at me.

“If you have any last words, you better tell me them now.”

“You’re... correct.”

“There’s no Superman in this world... Nor is there Batman. You’re correct. Absolutely correct.”

“Ahhh, so you finally got some sense knocked into you before dying.”

“But... you’re forgetting one thing.”

“Eh?”

“Everything you’ve said is definitely correct. However, that doesn’t mean you can forget this, Heimlich.”

Yes.

Even if I’m in a hellhole world where justice and whatever meant nothing from the beginning.

Even if I’m in an insignificant world with no Marvel or DC superheroes to be found.

“Even if I’m in a world where this is all I have left.”

But, even then, I still have this.

This flickering candlelight, blazing to the end of time, until the very end.

How much trouble this black-colored orchid caused.

That’s why I have a responsibility to tell her the reason.

That’s why I can tell her. That’s why I must.

“Even in this world, exists someone that doesn’t mind all this petty excuses and reasons, someone who’s willing to sacrifice everything she had just to save her precious family driven to a corner – Yes, I’m trying to tell you about the fact that this **world’s best older slash younger sister** is still alive and well!”

「Ka-boooom!」

And so, there was the second miracle.



“That is – the way of the Blackhazel.”

In response to my question, the《Princess of Pure Darkness》emotionlessly replies

back, colder and more merciless than she have ever sounded.

“The way of the Blackhazel, you say.”

You’re leaving your one-and-only sister like that alone, and you’re talking about this disgusting act of deserting someone in need because of a duty or whatnot – And you say it’s because of the ‘way of the Blackhazel’?

“Alright, fine. You can preach about this ‘way of the Blackhazel’ all you want.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m too dumb to know about duties, family structures and all that complicated stuff.”

Just the act of knowledge is a simple thing, something even a five-year-old would with a clap of their hand if they heard about this.

“My sister’s in danger. So I’m going to go out and save her by myself. That’s all.”

“What could you possibly do away from this place?”

“Who knows? I’ll think about that on the way.”

I really can’t take this anymore.

I know that this state I’m in right now can’t really be considered rational. That must I understand myself.

Not that I can think of some any other way that than this.

“I cannot approve that, Onii-sama.”

Maria replies coldly, in a tone that makes it clear of her disapproval.

“If onii-sama is planning on keeping up his childish stubbornness up, then I will have to resort to force.”

Maria snaps her finger.

And, what’s blocking my path is none other than Lily.

“Move aside.”

“...”

Lily clenches her fist and grits her teeth, and refuses to move out of the way, showing the determination she arrived to after making the decision herself.

“I’ll go on my own if I have to.”

When I was about slide past Lily’s side, as expected, an incredible force that a 12-year-old could hardly believe to exert stops me in my tracks.

“Let go, Lily!”

“Master’s command, ...absolute.”

“Dammit!”

Her overwhelming, professional hold is something my shallow resistance couldn’t even think to escape.

“Let go of me, Lily! Do you seriously agree with this ridiculous idea Maria has in mind? You know what kind of situation Dorothy is in right now, and you’re just going sit here and watch what happens?”

“...I won’t just, watch.”

“Then why?! Why are you just standing there silently with your head down while Maria’s talking about her grand ‘way of the Blackhazel’ or whatever?!”

Gazing into my struggling figure, Maria once again opens her mouth.

“Why would you think like that?”

“What?”

“Why would Onii-sama think that I **would obviously force myself to this ‘way of the Blackhazel?’**”

And at that moment.

I feel the illusion that the air inside the mansion changed flow and surged back.

“Whaa...?”

“Yes. If I was the Maria before meeting Onii-sama, then I could have thought so.”

Wondering about what Maria is talking about, I once again gaze into Maria’s face, scratching my head.

Lily’s grip that allowed not even a single step forward was already released, without my awareness.

“W-What are you...”

“But, it’s something Onii-sama taught me.”

“I – taught?”

“What the real important things are.”

Smiling like an angel, Maria calmly continues on her sentence.

“Yes, I won’t resort to measuring people’s worth again. I won’t think about giving up Dorothy for Onii-sama’s sake or anything like that. For this girl, both Dorothy and Onii-sama are precious persons in my family.”

Maria softly holds my hands and speaks on.

“It is you who taught me all this.”

She’s not the《Princess of Pure Darkness》she was just a moment ago.

“That’s why I ask of you, who taught me the importance of all this.”

“You...”

I don’t think the name ‘Pure Darkness’ suits you.

“Let us go take back Dorothy together.”

This girl, wreathed in the gentlest pure-white smile brighter than anything else in the world...

-.



「Ka-boooom!」

The explosion reverberates throughout.

It's a sound no one was expecting to hear.

Yes, no one but one.

Even before they realized what had happened, ‘they’ were already finishing up with their actual breach.

Having rappelled inside in the darkness, the shadows were moving about.

Whipping back dark trench coats behind them, like a pack of hyenas moving in for the kill, like a phalanx of soldiers trained in group movement.

The shape of their advance gives off the illusion that darkness itself is materializing and coming to life.

“Wh-What?”

The sudden change seems to alarm Heimlich; his eyes are wide open, mirroring his panic.

He realized that the situation took a worse turn for him, by more than he could possibly imagine.

Beyond the broken window on the building wall emerges a noisy propeller sound, and a military helicopter circling comes into the view.

It's the very same one that Maria emerged from when we first met, with the

emblem of two ashen wolves depicted on it.

On board is none other than the《Princess of Pure Darkness》.

Leading her servants of death, the《Princess of Pure Darkness》who was sure to have expected everything that has happened is standing right there.

Just gazing upon Maria enveloped in her emperor-like aura is enough to bring silence to everything around her.

But it's different from back then.

It's not the same silence from back when she dominated over the "Blades of the Left" with fear and cruelty.

To put in words, it would be much like seeing a general leading a reinforcement of millions from a battle long void of conclusion of victory.

Her image is too intense to call her a girl, but she is far too beautiful and distant to call her a general.

Maria.

Maria Lunalady Blackhazel.

《Princess of Pure Darkness》.

Her existence itself is enough to conjure up a hurricane to sweep through the world.



With the sudden interference by the Ladies in Black, the situation changes direction right away.

Helimlich, bound and surrounded by the Ladies in Black, can do nothing but cower in fear, incapable of doing anything.

"You are too foolish."

The blood-red pupils shines through the masks upon Ladies in Black's face, and Maria, standing in the midst of them, exudes a killing aura, almost intense enough to be tangible.

Even from a third party's views, it's enough fear to act as a heart-stopper.

"W-Why... are you."

Heimlich trembles, mumbling something in denial of her arrival.

"Why, just why...?"

"Speak, Heimlich."

"Why are you here, Maria?"

Maria won't come.

That was the elementary decision he had made based on 'the privilege only a member of the Blackhazel could have.'

And that decision was uprooted from the foundation.

His plan was an utter failure.

But why?

Heimlich continues on, in disbelief.

"Why did you come to save her?"

It's as if someone just explained to Heimlich that  $1+1$  equalled 3 in front of him, and I once again shake my head at the stubbornness that seemed to surround the Blackhazel family.

"Do not act on emotion and petty relations, and compromise your judgement! And make the family's continual existence priority, above everything else! Isn't that the way of the Blackhazel?!"

Yeah, there's no way he'd ever understand.

“And that’s exactly where you went, you idiot.”

Grasping my head still dizzy from before, I slowly rise from where I was standing.

“O-Onii-san!”

With that, Dorothy looks my way in terror, as if she just saw a ghost emerge from the grave.

Ah, I forgot to tell her about that.

I take off the jacket I was wearing to show the bulletproof vest I had underneath.

“So, hmm. To put it simply: *You just activated my trap card...* or something like that.”

But the sheer blunt impact from the bullet was enough to leave my head disoriented, even until now.

Continuing from where I left off.

“Heimlich, I’m sure you planned out all this on the basis that “Maria won’t come save neither me nor Dorothy.”

That was the way of the Blackhazel family.

They were the ones that accepted their twisted logic like it was completely normal.

“But before that common sense of the Blackhazel, there’s something you overlooked.”

Yes.

“That is, Maria chose to act not as a Blackhazel, but as **someone who wanted to protect her precious sister.**”

“Wh-What kind of nonsense are you spewing now?”

Heimlich is still slow to accept the situation around him, and takes to hiding from reality. Defeat. No matter how it’s looked at, it’s clear that the weight isn’t hinging to his side.

“It means you’ve lost.”

In response to the embarrassment my words delivered to Heimlich, his face once again contorts in anger.

“Ha! Ha! Me, lose...? How could I, Heimlich Milbas Blackhazel, heir to the Blackhazel family, could ever come to a defeat? I’m, I’m...!”

Just how long is this guy planning on hiding behind the Blackhazel name?

“You still don’t get it? It’s exactly because you tried to solve everything with your almighty ‘way of the Blackhazel’ that you’re in this situation right now.”

“!”

There’s nothing sweet about this.

Revenge or not, I’m just feeling a bit of headache at this guy so fixated on his twisted logic that is called ‘the way of the Blackhazel’ like it’s completely normal.

“Onee-samaaa....!”

One of the Ladies in Black undoes the leash around her neck, and Dorothy is quick to dive into Maria’s embrace.

“Onee-sama! Onee-samaaa....! Fuaaaaaaaaaa...!”

Maria embraces Dorothy who’s crying like a kid and smiles as she pets her head with the utmost care and gentleness than anyone could manage.

“Don’t cry, Dorothy.”

“I, I didn’t think you would come.... I thought you were going to abandon me forever... I thought that and I...!”

“Silly Dorothy. There’s no way I could abandon my one and only Dorothy.”

「Your sister will always be by Dorothy’s side.」

Maria calming Dorothy down is really nothing but an older sister taking care of her

sister.

So it's a happy family reunion then?

Certainly, it's a good scene to look at.

But that's that, and I still have something else to take care of.

Even if I'm about to fall over, it's not like I can just postpone this until tomorrow.

"Isn't that so? I could mix you in a blender and drink you, and I still wouldn't feel it's even."

"Hi-Hiiick!"

Maria's wrath. Ladies in Black's wrath. What he needs to experience right now is my wrath.

My method isn't like paralyzing someone with just my gaze, or something uselessly complicated like that.

As I say again, my method is quite simple and neat.

I walk towards Heimlich, and return the smile he had on his face before.

"J-Just a sec....!"

"Ohh, ya got any last words?"

"You crazy bastard!"

\**Pow-!*\*

There's no need for me to hold back. With everything I can muster, I drive my fist into his chin.

"Guuhaa!"

Like a pig before slaughter, his squeal really is something to hear as I watch him step backward from me.

The shape he's in right now is far from where a victor like he imagined himself to be in. It really is pitiful to watch him like this.

"W-Why are you doing this?"

I don't know how you can even ask something that obvious with a face drenched in fear like that.

"Are you getting that mad about a used good like her?"

\*Wince\*

"Used... good?"

He's referring to none other than Dorothy. Why are you jabbering on about something like used goods and decayed blood now, out of everyone else I expected to hear that from.

"I'm giving about three fucks for what you said. Oh well, let's hear about it first."

"Dammit, she's not even a 'person'! She's just a common 'good', anyway!"

"What?"

Heimlich's cries are so far from reality they resemble nothing but an echo of travesty. But maybe it's because of that travesty that I pause what I'm doing and look back.

"Ah, ahhh...."

There stands Dorothy blue with panic, not knowing what to do.

"That bitch is... ha, right! She's a manufactured good! A duplicate! She's not even going to live that long with her fake body anyway! That's why there's no need to get this angry.... Ha, aha, hmm? That bitch isn't even a person! She's just a 'tool'!"

"What are you talking about?"

Is this the new episode of SF animation-making with Dr. Kim or something?

"O-Onii-san?! Th-That's..."

"Yeah! She's only a kagemusha, made as Maria's duplicate! She was only an empty husk from the beginning, a half-life!"

"Shut your mouth!"

The first to respond is Maria.

"O-Onée-sama....!"

But the woman of topic herself, Dorothy, looks to be in panic and cannot regain herself.

Er, da hell are we talking about now?

Kagemusha in place of Maria?

Manufactured duplicate?

It can't be.

"So what you're saying is, Dorothy is some kind of coat hanger clone made with Maria's DNA or something?"

"Y-Yeah! Hah, that bitch isn't even a real human! She's just a fake made in place of Maria!"

Even as Heimlich speaks, I can even feel some kind of this winner's superiority show on his face.

Ah, but the thing is.

There's this part I don't get.

"So what about it?"

"...What?"

"No, that much I get. You're trying to say that Dorothy was born in some laboratory somewhere like a test-tube baby or something like that."

"Y-Yeah! That bitch never had something like human rights or anything like that"

from the beginning....!"

\*-Pow!\*

Unable to stand this idiot Heimlich's behavior any longer without feeling nauseous, I once again swing my fist.

This guy, I don't think this is going to work.

This guy has "I wasn't meant to be" written all over, deep down to the strands of DNA on his body.

Dorothy, she was a copy made as Maria's duplicate.

So. So that was why.

In a world like ours, I'm not surprised that biotechnology has come this far. Rather, all I'm feeling is a click in my head as the few pieces of puzzle inside snaps together.

For example, why I didn't see Dorothy in the childhood picture of Maria she showed me before.

Why didn't Dorothy come to the family meeting.

The reason for Dorothy's 'pride as a Blackhazel', that I took as her simple arrogance.

So. So it was like that...

I understand the basic question here.

But the thing is.

"So I'm asking, what about it!?"

I unleash another punch to his face.

"The important thing here is that Maria accepted Dorothy as her family."

\*Pow!\*

“The thing about me is that I really don’t give that much damn about blood and connections.”

I get on top of Heimlich’s chest, and batter down on his face until it resembles nothing but a bloody mess.

He’s lost all will to resist or scream at this point.

But I don’t care.

It won’t satisfy me otherwise.

“When my foster parents first took me in, it was because of the ‘hospitality’ they showed me that made me a member of the family.

Yes.

When I first remembered the ‘warmth’ they gave me.

“The reason why I ran away from those damned foster parents wasn’t because I was related to them or anything like that.”

Yes.

The important fact is the fact that they ‘never approved me as their son anymore’. The fact that I wasn’t ‘one’ of them.

Fracture.

Absence of reason.

「It’s not like I gave birth to him or anything.」

“Can you finally understand? Maria definitely took Dorothy in as a ‘member of the family’. That’s why Dorothy is also my precious sister and ‘family’ to me.”

The punches don’t stop.

Not until my fingers break and swell up.

"It's the same with Maria and Lily. Even if you're not related, connections and blood aren't that important, got it? The important thing is realizing that everyone is 'one'. No more, no less. Bunches like you who talk about purity of blood and all that could try all your lifetime and you still wouldn't understand."

\*Huff, huff\*

I cough roughly for air, gasping for breath because of my own beating, but I don't stop. This guy could just die like that, and I wouldn't care.

No,

I won't care.

I want to 'kill' this guy. Until he dies, I won't stop my arms from punching.

Why?

There's no way I can forgive him unless I do.

"Stop..."

Yes, I can't forgive him.

With that thought, my fists continue-

"Stop, isn't this enough? You don't have to put yourself like that just for me anymore, Siyoung-onii-chan!"

Perhaps the brutality was getting too much her to bear, and Dorothy hugs me from behind in her teary voice.

"Ah, ahh..."

I fall back weakly, and put on a rather awkward smile on my face.

Feelings refuse to return to my blood-covered hand.

Even so, as I watch Dorothy cry her eyes out, hugging me...

As I drift towards my fading conscience, I subconsciously think to myself.

This girl, isn't this the first time she called me by my name?

'Siyoung-onii-chan,' she said.

I think that's the first time.

It's like as if my mother-in-law who never acknowledged me finally took the time to call me by my name.

I think it's like that.

This feels really weird now.

/003.

One-year-old me is seven-year-old you.

Two-year-old me is eight-year-old you.

I am you, you are me. A ready-made with its beginning and end already determined.

"Who are you?"

And then, all of a sudden, 'you' appeared in front of 'me' and asked.

"I am you."

I answered, like they had instructed me.

My existence is as your duplicate. I exist here to fill the empty void you can't fill.

"No, I don't think that's it."

'I' said to 'myself'.

"You aren't me. 'You' are just 'you'."

As I did so, 'I' hugged 'myself'.

"Can you hear it, our beating hearts?"

“Yes.”

The two pulses are overlapping against each other. \**Ba-dum, ba-dum\** \**Ba-dum, ba-dum\**

“One is 「your」 beat.”

“One is 「my」 beat.”

Ahh.

It was like that.

“Who are you?”

The first person I got to know.

“My name is Maria.”

“Then who am I?”

And the realization of self.

“Your name is... Hmm, what would be good? Hmm, yes! From now on, your name is...”

-Dorothy.

# Epilogue. Reaching out to her hand :: Siyoung

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“Ahhh, my poor Heimlich!”

Izabel is in her mansion, chuckling as she reads the message from the Blackhazel.

The content is simple. For the blatant challenge of authority against the Blackhazel family master and her position, execution of Heimlich Milbas Blackhazel is announced.

Even at the news of death of her only brother, she feels no sadness.

No, as a matter of fact, this was the best scenario for what she was planning.

‘A sister angered at the death of her only brother.’

A **cause** like that couldn’t be more perfect to earn everyone’s sympathy and support.

And even if it was called a blatant challenge of authority against the Blackhazel family master, the incident has many parts that wouldn’t be judged exactly favourable by the Blackhazel family members.

“It’s unlike you to display a weakness like this, Maria-san.”

The two causes she was intending from the beginning were now in her grasp.

A cause that even the Blackhazel family members would understand if she voiced her complaint to the family master. A manifesto that would be enough to reanimated the rusted gears in this triangle.

A cause so valuable, that the death of her brother would be nothing of consequence.



And two weeks flew by.

The train they were in was racing through a plain covered in snow.

And this train was the Blackhazel-controlled exclusive train heading directly to the Sweden medical department agency. Well, let's just say it was Blackhazel-scale.

"Dorothy, that girl. I wonder how she's doing."

I nonchalantly think about her face.

Maria responds back in a rather sharp tone, voicing her confusion.

"My, Onii-sama. It's only been two days since Dorothy was admitted. Don't you think you're overdramatic?"

Yes.

Sorry.

I was just trying to get myself in the mood by trying to act tragically caring for a moment, I guess.

"Ahaha, well that, I just felt a little jumpy since I've been just sitting here for so long..."

\*Rattle rattle\*

The train's sensual bumps are transmitted to my body.

Past the long tunnel in the mountain across the border, a brilliant scenery like the ones from the texts of Snow Country came into view.

The base of the night whitened. It was something along that line.

Not that I'm Shimamura, but it's all good.

And so, the train stops near the medical agency, and we get onto the helicopter waiting for us to finish our journey.

But Dorothy, that girl. By the way she was telling me things, she was so sure a tumor was nothing

To be honest, I don't know if it's because I'm a layman when it comes medical knowledge, but it's true that I'm quite worried.

"You seemed to be worried about Dorothy?"

And to add, this girl Maria is a ghost who can read other people.

"Hmm? Ahaha, maybe a bit..."

Entering the medical department agency covered in cream-colored wallpaper, I scratch my head in response.

"Well, even if you tell me it's nothing, maybe it's because I'm not that smart, but isn't a tumor something to be worried about whether you're a clone or not?"

"Not really."

"Not at all."

"Hey, I know you guys are saying it's really fine, but I'm a bit worried to be hone... Huh?"

I think there's a spy among us.

Dorothy is already by our side, dressed in a hospital gown.

Maybe everyone in this family's a ghost, and everyone comes as a ghost set or something.

So I would be something like the protagonist getting possessed by the ghost like in those old horror movies.

Er, I have no idea what I'm talking about now.

"Oi you, normal patients don't zip around the hospital like this."

Entering the lobby of the medical department, I give Dorothy's head a little nudge.

"Uu!"

But you know what? I think I acted really mature just now, and I did it as if it's nothing like how water flows naturally.

As proof of that, isn't Dorothy not putting on the reaction she usually puts up?

It must be that I've grown up a bit from the stuff that happened 'before'.

Though this brat will stay the kid she is right now, never hitting puberty.

Isn't that so?

Ahahaha.... That was me laughing when suddenly,

\*-Wham!\*

Something crushed down my foot.

"Guaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"You, I don't like the way you're staring."

"Oww, that reason doesn't even make sense!"

"I don't like the way you're talking back."

Double hit.

"And that unkempt posture you're in."

Triple hit.

With a spectacular finish, my head crashes into the lobby floor just like that.

And my so-called bodyguard named Lily does nothing but keep her distance and look dully at me in silence.

"You! If you're supposed to be my bodyguard, then shouldn't you do something before I get beaten to death?"

With my neck bent 90 degrees, I look up to Lily and voice my complaint.

“Pfft.”

In response is Lily’s snickering.

...

Yes.

If I think about it, then maybe nothing has really changed.

“Are you guys just trolling me right now?!”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah...”

Perhaps it was unnecessary for me to confirm it, since I already knew that much. But still, it’s a little sad hearing it directly from them.

Was it because she couldn’t bear the sight of me being torn apart by the two? Eventually, Maria joins in to say her share.

“Both of you, do not speak too harshly of Onii-sama.”

Nice artillery support.

With just her joining in, Maria’s influence turns the tide of the war in a blink of an eye; that’s how overwhelming she is.

It’s overpowering. If I could use an analogy, it’d be like when the U.S. joined World War II, as a response to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Hiding behind her back with my eyes full of expectation, I root for Maria and her words.

“His table manners are indeed disastrous. He certainly doesn’t have a single ounce of elegance as a Blackhazel. And it is true that half of his blood is that of the inferior Yellow race. Even then... He is our one and only Onii-sama!”

Oh my, such encouraging words they are!

...Wait.

“Maria, I never thought you’d be mean to me as well!”

Like a seven-year-old kid running away from a bully, I run into my room with tears streaming down with my face; I feel like something this has happened before, as my *déjà vu* reminds me.

Whoo, I really don’t think I can keep up being a Blackhazel.

But it’s not like I have a choice.

It’s my fate to get chewed up like this.

It’s because...

I’m their one and only ‘Onii-sama’.



# Afterword

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Nice to meet you, this is Kim Wolhui.

I hope you had fun reading this novel. If you have, then there is no greater enjoyment for me, and if you haven't, then I'll be trying harder next time to produce a better novel for everyone.

My first book from SEED Novel, 「My Darkness Sister」, is basically about a normal protagonist with nothing noteworthy meeting his 'greatest little sister in the world' and the romance that unfurls between them.

Maria, in the eyes of the world, is the leader of a multinational military corporation that seeks to provoke military conflict and establish a monopolistic system to disturb justice and gain wealth— in short, she is an archvillain.

But even for someone like her, she's endlessly kind and gentle towards those close to her... was the idea I've had for this novel.

Of course, as I wrote this, I feel a slight regret in the fact that Maria wasn't more accurately portrayed and in her other image, but overall I feel that she's an attractive heroine.

How did you, the readers, think?

My Darkness Sister, was it up to your expectation?

It was sometime around May during the novel contest where I felt publishing a book felt a bit dream-like, in a faraway land, but now that I'm writing afterword like this and looking at the published book, I must say the change feels pleasantly new to me.

My word of thanks goes to publisher Mr.K, to the illustrator who drew me something beyond my expectation, Mr. so-and-so who should be saving Azeroth from destruction, and of course, to my dear readers who should be reading this afterword right about now.

I hope we can meet again once more on volume 2 if we can, as I conclude this afterword.

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